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ABSTRACT

The atmosphere of focused interaction during a summer conference dealing with professional writing for children is recalled in this publication. The publication reports the experiences of diverse writers-in-residence who spent their days at Lake Chautauqua sharing their love and passion for children's literature--guiding, nurturing, inquiring, lecturing, discussing, mentoring, and critiquing emerge at the end with a sense of community. Articles and presentations in the publication and their authors are, as follows: "Chautauqua as Community" (Neil Waldman); "Discovering the Joy of Writing" (Jane Yolen); "Welcome!" (Joy Cowley); "The Scholarship Program" (Kent L. Brown, Jr.); "A Writer's Alphabet of Words" (Peter Jacobi); "The Book Journey: The Inside Story" (Patricia Lee Gauch); "The Current State of Children's Book Publishing" (James Cross Giblin); "Publishing Trends" (Judy O'Malley and Jewell Stoddard); "Nonfiction for a Day--for a Lifetime! The Nonfiction Easy Reader" (Rosanna Hansen); "The Many Dimensions of Research" (Laurence Pringle); "The Process of Writing How-To Books: The Second Book" (Andy Gutelle); "Difficult Subjects" (Susan Tejada); "Publishing Nonfiction" (Brent Farmer); "Bespoke Writing" (Lionel Bender); "History: Think Locally, Write Nationally" (Carolyn P. Yoder); "How to Write a Children's Book" (Fredrick and Patricia McKissack); "Where Do Ideas Come From?" (Mary Lou Carney); "What Makes a Great Book?" (Maria Salvadore); "Believing in Yourself" (Dayton O. Hyde); "A Rebus Primer" (Marileta Robinson); "Creating Memorable Fiction" (Linda Oatman High); "Conflict" (Kristi Holl); "Journal Writing" (Pat Ramsey Beckman); "Presenting Another Culture" (Marianne Mitchell); "The Naturalist's Journal" (Mark K. Baldwin); and "Writing for Teacher Publications" (Pat Broderick). (NKA)

Writing for Children

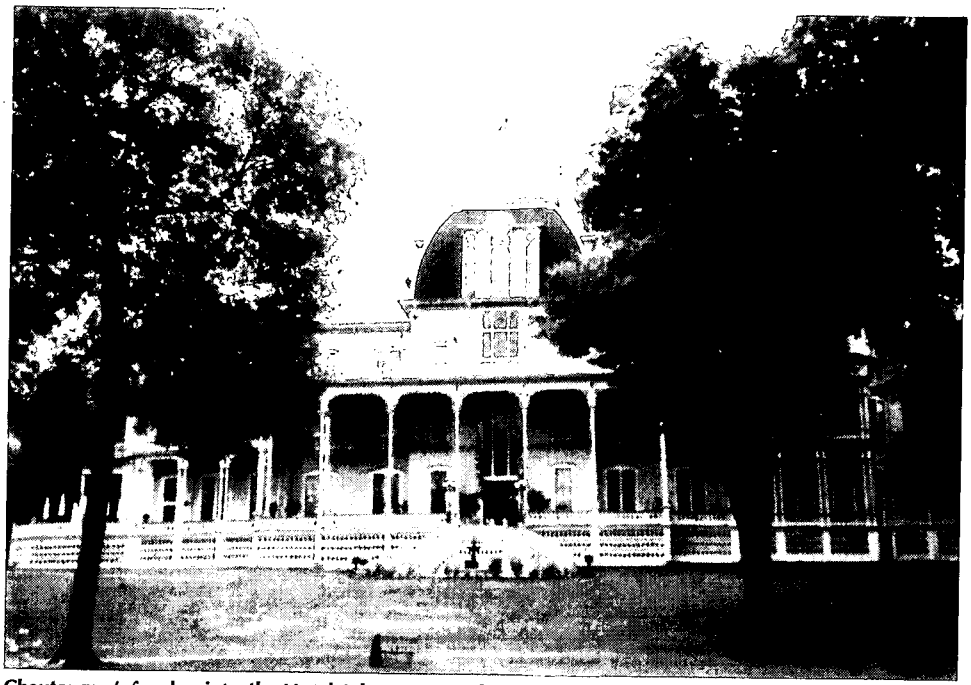
The Report of the 1998 Highlights Foundation Writers Workshop at Chautauqua

IN THIS REPORT

FEATURES

ABOUT THE COVER
The Highlights Foundation week at Chautauqua blends work and fun in a magical atmosphere. The cover scenes are typical of our conference.

 Editor: Carolyn Yoder. More copies of this report are available from Highlights Foundation, Inc., 814 Court Street, Honesdale, PA 18431. Phone: 570-253-1192; E-mail: @aol.com



Chautauqua's focal point—the Hotel Athenaeum—where the opening and closing banquets are held.

Chautauqua as Community

NEIL WALDMAN

As I drove through Chautauqua's main gate for the first time, I felt my pulse quicken. The attendant handed me a map, which I followed through neighborhoods of quaint Victorian houses, manicured parks and gardens, arriving at last at my hotel. I stepped out of my car, watched a sailboat gliding across the still blue waters of Lake Chautauqua, and smiled with expectation and excitement.

That first afternoon I met a broad array of exceptional people with whom I would share my week. They came from as far away as London, the south of France, and New Zealand. There were several writers and artists whose work I'd long admired, editors I recognized or knew of, and a plethora of enthusiastic and dedicated people who carried within them the dream of becoming successful children's book writers and illustrators.

During that week we would be thrust into an atmosphere of intimate and focused interaction. We would spend our days intensely, sharing our love and passion for children's literature, attempting to enrich each other, guiding, nurturing, inquiring, lecturing, discussing, mentoring, and critiquing. What emerged was a sense of community, a feeling that as writers we were all of the same family.

When I drove back through the gate on the following weekend, I began to reflect on the experience. I pictured the faces of new friends I'd made, considered their words and their enthusiasm, and thought of the many ideas they'd generated and shared. It seemed that much more than seven days had passed. For we left Chautauqua slightly changed, far richer than we had been a week before.

NEIL WALDMAN

Neil has illustrated more than twenty children's books, including *Gold Coin* by Alma Flor Ada, *Passover Journey* by Barbara Goldman, *Nessa's Fish* by Nancy Luenn, and *Next Year in Jerusalem: 3,000 Years of Jewish Stories* retold by Howard Schwartz. He wrote and illustrated *The Two Brothers: A Legend of Jerusalem*, and has illustrated more than one hundred book jackets, including seven Newbery Award winners. Last year, *By the Hanukkah Light*, written by Sheldon Oberman, showcased Neil's most recent work.

"Discovering the Joy of Writing"

JANE YOLEN

"Our opening banquet speaker inspires, builds confidence, puts people at ease, lets them know we are all there for the same reasons: our love of writing and our desire to give children the very best fiction and nonfiction possible." So that was my charge. You will have to decide whether I manage to do it.

There are writers who believe that writing is agony, and that's the best anyone can say of it. Gene Fowler's famous words are quoted all the time. He said, "Writing is easy. All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead." Red Smith said, "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein."

Jane Yolen performs at an evening of storytelling.

You know, that's a particularly messy way of working. And blood is very hard to get off white paper. I am one of those people who make a distinction between being a writer and being an author. A writer puts words on a page. An author lives in story. A writer is conversant with the keyboard, but the author knows character. Roland Barthes has said that "the author performs a function; the writer, an activity."

We are talking here about the differ- between desire and obsession, between hobby and life. But in either case, whichever road you choose, I suggest you learn to write not with blood and fear but with joy. Joy, for me, is a personal choice. First of all, I'm not a masochist. I'm not willing to submit myself day after day to something that brings me pain. And I do mean day after day because I write with a regularity that an octogenarian would envy. So, like a dancer or an athlete, I am uncomfortable and even damaged by a day away from my work.

Second, you need not have to have an unhappy life to write tragedy. Or conversely, you don't need to be deliriously happy all the time to write comedy. In fact, as you know, most standup comics admit to being miserable most of the time. Shakespeare was neither a king nor a fool; and he wasn't a Moor and he wasn't a Jew; he never saw a real fairy; he was never at sea in a tempest. His life was somewhere between happy and sad, as are most authors' lives. Yet Shakespeare could write tragedy and comedy and all between. And so can you.

Authors are like actors. We get under the skin of our characters, inhabiting their lives for a while. We just don't have to live on with them forever. If you do, there is a name for that. It's called psychosis. I have written about dragons, mermaids, angels, and kings. And I have never met any up close and personal. I have even written a murder mystery. I didn't have to murder anyone in order to write it. Still, don't mess with me. I did my research.

Third, writing for a living is much easier than spending a lot of time on a therapist's couch, and it's cheaper, too. We get to parade our neuroses in public, disguised as story. And if we're lucky, we get paid for it as well. And we get applause. Kurt Vonnegut once said, "Writers get to treat their mental illnesses every day." Writing poetry and fiction is a bit like dreaming. You can find out what is troubling you on the very deepest level. That your writing goes on and on and touches somebody else is one of the pieces of magic that attends to art.

I speak of choosing joy as if this were truly a matter of choice. For some people it's not. For some, only agony oils the writing machine. So if you are one of those agony people, you find writing with pain is part of your process. I won't try to talk you out of it.

I contend that it's not the writing that makes writers miserable. It is the emphasis on publication. If you think of it this way, the etymology of the word *publish* simply means "to make public." Presumably you could stake out a street corner like the old Quaker publishers of the truth, and shout maxims into the air, and that would mean you were published. Or you could put something on a web page on the Internet and invite a flame war. Or you could hire a printer and produce a thousand copies of a

JANE YOLEN

Jane is the award-winning author of more than 180 books for children, young adults, and adults. She moves gracefully from poetry, folktales, and songs to fantasy and science fiction. Also a storyteller, she often receives requests from other storytellers to add her work to their repertoire.

Jane's best-known title, the critically acclaimed *Owl Moon*, illustrated by John Schoenherr, won the Caldecott Medal in 1988.

story. Do any of the above and you are literally published. But I can't think of a university department or a National Book Award committee or a Newbery Award committee that would look at that and say that it was so.

Over the thirty-five years I've been in publishing, the word *publish* has changed in meaning. It has now come to mean a book printed on fine paper with a beautifully designed cover, an ad budget of $200,000, an eleven-city book tour, an interview on the *Today Show*, a nomination for the Pulitzer or the Hans Christian Andersen or the National Book Award, and returns of under fifty percent.

Now, I'm never going to get any of that. And you may never get any of that either. All we can count on is the joy in the process of writing. Uncovery, discovery, recovery are all part of that process. Uncovery is that first wonderful scratching at the itch of an idea, taking the lid off a pot and smelling the first tempting odors of what is cooking, pulling back the blanket and airing the linens of the mind.

Norton Juster was once talking to a roomful of children. Someone asked him, "Where do your ideas come from?" And he said, "From a post box in Poughkeepsie." He was trying to get them to understand that ideas are out there, all around us, nudging us, itching us, posting themselves from Poughkeepsie. What does it matter where the ideas come from? Ideas are only the very beginning of the writing process.

Discovery is the next step: learning about the characters, finding out about the setting, researching the period (making lists of the gross national product of a world). As a side comment, I have to remind you that many people get lost in the discovery process, and they never actually finish finding the story they are trying to sell.

So uncovery, discovery, and then recovery—the moment of putting everything together. I love that word because it has suggestions of putting a new jacket on an old book as well as ideas of wellness and wholeness, and of course the suggestion that we have taken our simple, unadorned idea and clothed it in glory.

Obviously, all those "-coveries" take time. A lot of time. So a writer had better enjoy the *process* because it's going to be a long, slow walk to the hanging. An[illegible]ng is often what it seems to be. [illegible] hanging as in a painting on a museum wall, but hanging as in the gallows. There you are—the noose, the quick drop.

More and more often these days publishing has taken on the aspect of a public execution. There have been many serious changes in the world of children's publishing, and we need to regard them seriously. Harold Underdown put it succinctly in a recent article. He said, "Sales of hardcover books are down from the peak they hit in 1992, and even paperbacks saw a decline." There's no major children's book publisher that has not laid off staff in the past five years, and many well-known imprints have closed. Such respected names as Macmillan, Bradbury, Cobblehill, Joy Street Books, Four Winds Press no longer exist. Having cut staff, many publishers will not look at unsolicited submissions. They just don't need to. All the books they publish come from their current authors and illustrators.

So, you have to ask yourself, Is there any joy in publishing at all? I am here to tell there is. The publishing world is like a burned-out forest that looks blackened and dead but is disguising new growth underneath. There are new companies, there are new editors, there are old editors in new and interesting positions. If you open your mind a bit more, there are healthy regional presses and specialty publications. And some people remind me there is also the beginning of publishing on the Internet.

So I always tell people to take joy behind the publishing shadow. As Aiden Chambers said once, "Reading is an act of contemplation. Writing is simply a part of that ritual activity. I write that I may read. And so contemplate what I have written."

The Bell Tower on the shore of Lake Chautauqua is one of the institution's historic landmarks.

At writers' conferences there are always well-meaning teachers who will offer you rules about writing, handing them down as if they were written on stone tablets. Don't believe us. I can only give you rules about writing that I have applied to myself. However, some of them are rules that you may be able to adapt or adopt, and they may work for you.

They are simple: Write every day. Write what interests you. Write for the child inside of you, not for any outside

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It's a productive and inspiring week for the participants, but I found it equally inspiring as a faculty member. The general sessions and workshops I attended ranged from excellent to awesome, and it was a pleasure to observe this wonderful faculty working unselfishly in one-on-one sessions with the conferees.

—Brent Farmer, president and publisher, Charlesbridge Publishing, Watertown, MA

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audience. Write with honest emotions. Be careful of being facile. Be wary of preaching. Be prepared for serendipity. And, of course, write with joy. That was a fast list, and I'm going to take a sl-o-o-w movement here to tell you about each of those.

Write every day. Someone at my table asked whether I like to write journals. I have to tell you I'm not one of those people who can keep a diary or a journal. I'm always aware that I'm writing to be read. A journal is writing to be hidden. I want to get my enormous inner energy onto a page as a story because only then can it go from me to a reader. But I do admit that I envy obsessive journal keepers. And I read published journals with an avidity that touches on voyeurism. I have to believe that either these folks lead much more interesting lives than I do or else they lie very convincingly.

I've come home determined, inspired, and confident that the writer in me will be transformed to author because of Chautauqua. It is truly a magical place where dreams do come true.

—Lisa Albert, Muskego, WI

Actually, I think that all superior journal writers seem to share some marvelous relationship to their surroundings. They know, for example, the serial numbers and background information on tables, chairs, silverware, sled dogs, pinking shears. They know about fact checking the heritage of different kinds of snow, the proper and improper names of flowers, the family trees of bumblebees, the dates of English nobility.

I think writing every day doesn't mean that one has to write in a journal. It simply means that one needs to exercise the writing muscle, prime the writing pump.

Everyday writing is just that. The old river water thrown into the pump is your letters, revisions, journal entries, and, if you're so minded, shopping lists, titles. And then the sympathetic magic takes hold. As water calls to water, words call to words. Up they come from the unplumbed depth. Some people call this inspiration, and some people call it talent, and some people call it soul: sweet-as-spring new ideas, sentences, paragraphs, stories, poems. Gushing forth, flowing, if you're lucky even overflowing. Your writer's day starts.

Write what interests you. For me that is actually easy. Almost everything except science, Brussels sprouts, and hockey interests me. And I have managed to get the first two into stories and poems anyway. But I must tell you that hockey still eludes me. Too many teachers, of course, beat the truism into students' heads: You must write what you know. Well, I have written about Chinese emperors, mermaids, dragons, pirates, Native American horses, space, toads, the disappearing Island of Surtsey, bells, and murderers. What I know about all of those personally comes only through research. So I would rather change that bit of advice and say: Write about what you find interesting, or write about what it is that you think you need to know.

Write for the child inside of you. By this I mean, don't look outside for an audience. Look inside. I have three children, one toddler grandchild, one newborn grandchild, one adopted grandchild. And as much as I love them and as well as I know them, I am never going to be able to please all of them in my books and still stay honest to my own personal truths.

Even when my children were growing up, I didn't try out my ideas on them, but I did give them copies of my books. They were not made to feel they had to read every book. These were just books for their bookshelves. In other words, they were allowed to read what they preferred. Now they are adults, and as far as I can tell only my daughter reads everything that I've written, and she's behind about three years' work. One son reads the science fiction and fantasy. The other son smiles at me, thanks me, and goes off fishing.

That's as it should be. I'm not writing for them, I'm writing for me. And when I write children's books, I'm writing for the child I was and, in many ways, still am. A child who was an omnivorous reader, a lover of words, shy unless performing, always engaged in story.

And when I write an adult book, I write for the still omnivorous adult reader I am. I write the books I want to read, the ones I cannot find anywhere else. I write the book to find out what is going to happen, just as I read a book to find out what is going to happen.

Write with honest emotions. We all have certain emotional core truths. Some of them we know. Some of them are hidden, even to ourselves. I hold the following closely: truthfulness (what a strange thing for somebody who writes fantasy), loyalty to the people I love, the efficacy of hard work, the conviction that the goodness inside of each person can be reached if found early enough, and the belief that the greatest gift of all is the gift of giving. These are truths that I *know* I hold.

But sometimes other truths come through in a book even without one's willing them. And these often take an

Barbara Bender and Peter Jacobi conferring after Peter's presentation on Monday morning.

eye other than the author's own to discover. For example, three months before my mother died in 1970, she had come to visit me and to read the manuscript of my newest picture storybook, which was called *The Bird of Time*. In that story a miller's son, Pieter, finds a bird that can miraculously control time—can speed it up or slow it down or stop it altogether. Pieter uses the bird to help rescue a king's daughter who has been caged up by a wicked giant. Now at that time, though my entire family knew my mother was dying of cancer, my father had begged us not to tell her. So we had this polite fiction being written within the family that Mother had a form of non-threatening Hodgkin's disease. Well, when she finished reading my manuscript she looked up, and with a familiar wry twist of her mouth she said to me, "Intimations of mortality, eh?"

Only then did I understand what my story was really about, a story I had begun writing on the very day I had been told that my mother had incurable cancer. I wanted to slow time down or stop time altogether to keep my mother with me and alive. And she was telling me that after reading my story she understood that I knew she was dying. And she wanted to tell me she knew it, too, though neither one of us was allowed to say so. It was a painful and beautiful and important moment for us both. Discovering through story a way to tell each other what we needed to know.

I guess the point is that one must write with as much honesty as possible, which is not an easy or even comfortable way to write. But there are also times when the writer is not aware of how much honesty is really in a story. The "honesty" sword has two very sharp edges.

Be careful of being facile. That's the best advice that was ever given to me by an editor, and it came early in my career. What she actually said was, "You have enormous facility. Do not be beguiled by it." So if facility in writing is your particular gift, I give you what was given to me. I have written verse easily since I was a child. I even wrote my Smith College final exam in American Intellectual History in rhyme. It so stunned the teacher who was proctoring the exam, walking up and down the aisles, that he came back seven times to check out that I was really writing in rhyme. And then he gave me an A+.

All of us writers develop certain tricks: phrases that come so trippingly off the tongue that we use them again and again and again, characters that commute from book to book. There are obvious examples. Think of Barbara Cartland's novels or the Goosebumps books. We all have interchangeable sets of things that we write, party tricks. The problems that come with being a well-known writer are different, of course, from the problems that come from being a beginner. A beginning writer worries about closure, about developing skills, about getting that one big chance. The well-published writer must deal with the tendency to perform the party tricks, and use them over and over, the tendency to be facile.

But it's incumbent upon all of us—beginners, people in the middle, and people who have come far along that road as writers—to keep stretching; we must keep trying new things. Never settle for the easy, for the already-done, for doing what we know we can do without breaking out in a mental sweat.

Be wary of preaching. This is a really tough one. Whether we like it or not, literature always carries with it the seeds of didacticism. All of literature teaches, preaches, contains moral precepts, or works hard at violating moral precepts. To put it bluntly, authors are mired in their society. Children's literature is an especially didactic art form; that is, children's literature is used as a teaching tool. So it's easy to understand that it is a didactic creation. Even when it's not being taught in the classroom, a children's book is teaching its young readers something.

Ursula Nordstrom, who was the great editor at Harper, said something really instructional to a new writer worried about writing what had already been written. "The children," she said, "are new, though we are not." Well, everything in a good book (and perhaps everything in a bad book, too) is a new truth, a new revelation to a child, whose experiences are limited. Therefore, writers for children need to be extra careful about preaching, about filling in those empty spaces for the child.

Still, there's a big difference between an author laboring to put a moral in a book and having a moral sense emerge organically from the plot, the situation, and the characters' reacting to it. I always like to remind people that Samuel Goldwyn once said of the movies, "If you want to send a message, use Western Union." Preach without the *p* is reach. I would by far rather reach my audience than preach to it. And in the end, it's better for us both.

Chautauqua is a place of flowers and beauty.

Be prepared for serendipity. The word *serendipity* means "a happy accident." A writer must organize her luck, be ready for whatever happy accidents occur along the route of the story. That may mean clipping articles that interest you, even when you have not a clue as to what you're going to do with them. It means buying odd books on the off chance that you may have need of them. It means being open to a universe of possibility before a story ever arrives. Serendipity is not so simple as luck. It's

the result of conscious forging of links, the writer becoming a participant in each act of happy accident. The Gestalt therapists have a name for it: they call it the "Aha!" Scientists call it the "Eureka!" Arthur Koestler described it as the shaking together of two previously disconnected matrices. Louis Pasteur said, "Chance favors the mind that is prepared."

Waiting patiently for dinner on the Hotel Athenaeum's porch.

And nowhere is this more important than in science and in literature. An author, like any fresh-faced and eager Boy Scout, must always be prepared. You should also be prepared to be surprised by your own writing. Surprised by what you find out about yourselves and about your world. Be ready for the happy accident. Open yourself to the numinous, to the shapes and shades of language, to that first powerful thrust of story, to the character that develops away from you like a wayward adolescent.

You are the very first reader of what you write. Please that reader because you may have no other. I vividly remember staying overnight at Bruce Coville's apartment in New York City and hearing him working in the next room. First was the *tap, tap, tap, tap, tap* of the keyboard, then a spontaneous explosion of joy. He was laughing at his own work. He was loving what he was writing.

Writing needs to take us into a brighter, deeper, more engaging world than the world we actually live in. Even mediocre writing can do this, but good writing creates this. E.L. Doctorow said, "Not the fact that it's raining, but the feeling of being rained upon. Great writing sets the reader down in worlds that become the reader's in two senses of the word, matching or embellishing the reader's mind and then metamorphosing the reader by the incorporation of the world into his or her own."

These stories grace our actual lives with their fictional realities. Like angels, they lift us above the hurrying world and carry us in their pockets of light. How can you not approach such worlds with joy?

Now know this about being published: it is out of your hands. Even if you do everything you can think of to effect that outcome, you can't make an editor take your work. You can go to conferences. You can take the creative writing classes. You can read the books about writing. You can set a work schedule on your computer. You can make a special place and space for your writing. You can travel to Yaddo and make friends with performance artists. You can subscribe to *PW* and *The Writer* and *School Library Journal* and *Book Links*. You can get a B.A. or an M.F.A. or a Ph.D. in medieval lit. You can work as a day laborer, having heard it will ready you for writing the great American novel. You can take a job as a librarian because something tells you that's the way to learn to write children's books. You can walk around Lower Slobovia for a year or sail across the Atlantic in a water closet—it doesn't guarantee a thing. (Though all of those are probably more effective than merely having talent.)

But I want to talk about joy. I will not let other things like the real world intrude. So once you have committed any words to the page and have sent your manuscript off to the publisher, it is really, truly beyond your capacity to make anything happen regarding the publishing of your work. Besides, as Emily Dickinson pointed out, "Publication is the auction of the mind of man." Some of you may be cynical enough to remember that she wrote that after unsuccessfully trying to market her poems.

But once a book is in the mail, relax. Read a good book or read a bad book. Don't worry about it. Better yet, write another good book yourself.

I want to end by telling you about the first time I took a small hopper plane—a four-seater—to Port Townsend, Washington, to go to the Centrum Writers' Conference. I expected to be terrified. The plane really only fit three of us comfortably with the pilot. And one extra passenger—I think it was Leslie Silko—insisted on coming. And so she had to scrunch on top of luggage in the back. I'm afraid of flying in a large plane. I clutched the seat belt with both hands. But instead of being scared to death, I found the ride exhilarating. We skimmed the treetops, crossed the water, followed the gray ribbons of road, and swooped down at last onto the runway at the little Port Townsend airport, which really was no more than a meadow with a windsock at the end.

Sometimes writing is like that, flying just treetop level until the story or poem rises up to meet you. There is a joy when the air rushes past your wings. There is a sense of completeness when the journey is over. I wish all of you such joyous flights in your own writing. Save the blood and the pain for real life, where tourniquets and ibuprofen can have some hope of helping. Do not be afraid to grab hold of the experience of writing with both hands and take joy.

I am hoping that the week at Chautauqua will help launch my writing career in the sense of getting books accepted for publication. This might come about in two ways: through the contacts I have made and by my taking the knowledge I learned at the conference and applying it to my own writing. I hope to one day return to Chautauqua as a speaker.

—Nancy Dearborn, Tucson, AZ

LAMB ROAST AT WESTFIELD

Welcome!

JOY COWLEY

As writers, we know that the word *special* is a lazy adjective. We shouldn't use it too often in children's writing. We use *special* when our minds have gone to sleep and we can't think of a precise adjective.

But the word special also has layers of mystery to it. I promise you, you'll unwrap those layers as you unwrap your own talents this coming week. Some of you have been here before. You have experienced the living out of the Maori proverb—What is the greatest thing? People. People. People—and you know it will work for you again. For many this is the first time at a Highlights Writers Workshop. And at this stage, you're wondering what the week will bring. This is my eighth year. I haven't been here as often as some have, but from that eight-year span of experience, I can make the following predictions.

Expect this to be different from any other writing workshop you've attended. Like many of you I have had experience of other writing workshops, and I can tell you that *Highlights* is unique. And I use *unique* as a precise adjective.

The Australia connection! Joy Cowley (left) and Helen Placanica (right), from New Zealand and Australia, respectively, enjoy some "down" time outside the Hall of Christ.

Expect to become community in a surprisingly short time. I would even use the word friendly because that's how we feel at the end of the week. Writers and illustrators are solitary people. Right? Wrong! See what happens when they come together in a caring environment, all talking the same language.

Expect to be very busy. There'll be one-to-one work on your current project. There will be the "Ooh! Aah!" workshops where we encounter new ideas ("Ooh!") and have some of our old ideas affirmed ("Aah!"). There will be a constant adrenaline rush of inspiration as you chat with faculty and fellow conferees.

There will be lots of good food, entertainment, and more laughter than you can part with. Sleep? Who said anything about sleep?

Expect to reclaim and celebrate your inner child. Expect to be nurtured. Expect to grow as an author. Expect some cosmic shift in your personal world of creativity. This will happen. Expect to live a whole year or more in one week. And expect to be worn out. On Tuesday you'll be saying, "Oh, a week isn't long enough. I need to be here a whole month." Believe me, by Saturday you'll be stammering. You'll go home, sleep for two days, and then you will write and write and write.

The transformation works effectively, too. After a week that I consider to be the biggest week of the year—actually the "highlight" of the year (pun intended)—I, too, sleep for a couple of days, and then I write and write and write. That's the way it seems to work.

What causes this transformation? I could tell you about the huge amount of work behind the scenes, a solid year of planning by the *Highlights* staff. I'm amazed at what goes on to make this conference run smoothly. I could talk about the *Highlights* philosophy. I could go on for ages about the impact *Highlights* has made on children's literature and children's education in this country.

I'm going to say a few words now to beginner authors. We all rejoice in our inner child, but, you know, in me I have another person as well. I have the beginner writer. In years at school, my beginner writer got praise and prizes for her writing, and that was not altogether a good thing. Because then she had to move out into the hard world of rejection slips. And believe me, mine was a long and painful apprenticeship. So that beginner writer became a fearful person. She became also very self-critical. And she starts up every time I begin a story. "Oh, experience doesn't count. This time you won't make it. This time you'll fall on your face. Oh, no, you can't do it." And nice words of encouragement such as, "Have you looked in a mirror? You're past it. Why don't you take up crochet or bridge?"

I have to deal with the beginner writer every time I start a story. I have to deal with my own fear. And every story is new ground. And I have to break that fear barrier in it. But, you know, I have one other problem, too. I can never see my story when I've written it. The actual process of writing can be extremely powerful. Sometimes words will carry us away beyond ourselves, and we feel they have taken us to a new territory we've never been in before. I can never evaluate those words. I don't know what they are.

What do I need to do? I need to give it some time, that's about all. I need help. I need an editor. I need someone to say, "Have you thought of this? Have you thought of that?" In fact, my story is not polarized. It's not as bad either. It's somewhere in the middle. Nobody is all perfect where their writing is concerned. I need a little surgery, a little help from friends I can trust. Maybe I can turn it into something. And if I can't, well, there are more ideas where that came from.

JOY COWLEY

From her ranch on New Zealand's Marlborough Sounds, Joy has produced a highly acclaimed body of work for children. In 1990, New Zealand awarded her its Commemorative Medal for her service to children's literature, and in 1992 she received the Order of the British Empire. Massey University awarded Joy an honorary doctorate of letters in 1993.

Joy's *The Silent One* received the New Zealand Children's Book of the Year Award, and has been made into a film shown on the Disney Channel.

The Scholarship Program

KENT L. BROWN JR.

The words that follow, summarizing the scholarship program for the Highlights Foundation, are excerpted from Kent Brown's talk at the closing banquet of the 1998 conference.

There are fifteen people sitting out there who received some amount of aid to come to this conference. I want to talk about that program because I think it's very important. Chautauqua is getting ever more popular, and one of the consequences is that the prices go up. Now I'm committed to holding this conference here because it's a magical place. I think you would all agree that this setting adds something.

A scholarship is about hope. When I received my scholarship, it was a positive affirmation of my worth as a children's writer. Someone believed in me with unconditional acceptance. I felt I was coming home — coming to a place of strangers I'd never met yet considered family. I walked into Chautauqua believing that a cherished relationship already existed there for me. I never once doubted it. I never once was proved wrong.

—Scholarship recipient

There is not a particularly high correlation between the potential to help children through words and the ability to pay large conference fees. So there are many who help in the very important work of funding scholarships.

I mentioned that amongst this group there are fifteen recipients of scholarships this year. Some are here because of the people who care about Dick Bell, some who wished to remember my mother, Betty Brown.

We also have a fund now in the name of our longtime colleague Jerome Weisman. There is a scholarship in the memory of Anna Cross Giblin, Jim Giblin's mother, and the Pam Conrad fund, supported by many of Pam's friends. There's one in the name of Constance McAllister. That's kind of interesting because a person who came here the first year took me aside and said, "You know this is great, but this is pretty expensive. There are people you could serve who could make a real contribution to children, and you're not getting them." And I said, "Well, what would you do about that?" That person said, "I'll send one writer next year in honor of Constance McAllister. She wrote me the most beautiful rejection letter that any author ever got." And that Constance McAllister scholarship is in its thirteenth year.

Next year will be the first time that there will sit amongst us a recipient of a Jan Keen scholarship. Friends of Jan Keen have joined together, knowing what she has meant to this conference over thirteen years, to honor her.

So now it comes down to what you can do to help. For the vast majority, what you can do is take what you've gotten here and put it to work, in writing words with passion, in publishing things that will change the heartbeat of kids. We will consider that your success at doing that is a noble way of recognizing your experience here.

There are others of you, however, who can help another way. And that is to identify in your community and your group of friends and writers those who might greatly benefit from this experience but may not at the moment be able to afford to come. We would be grateful to have you talk to them about our opportunities to attend this conference on a scholarship. There is a third way, and I will keep this brief because it's not for most of us. We certainly welcome financial assistance. I would be remiss if I didn't say that. We're a 501(c)3 public foundation, an educational charity. Gifts are tax deductible, and we've gotten so sophisticated that we can deal with charitable remainder trusts, gifts of appreciated property, and so on. Any of those three ways that you can help in the future will contribute to our ongoing scholarship program. I think perhaps I covered our scholarship program to excess. I simply want to charge you now to believe in yourselves as this faculty has believed in you. Go forth and put the magic of your Chautauqua to work.

Mary Griffin (left) and Carolyn Yoder enjoy a spirited conversation at Webb's on Thursday night.

A special thank-you

The Highlights Foundation wishes to express thanks to the many donors to the scholarship fund.

In addition, special appreciation to *Guideposts for Kids* for hosting the Thursday night dinner.

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A Writer's Alphabet of Words

PETER JACOBI

Standing up here at these annual Monday morning openers, I have in recent years sermonized, not in this particular order, on the seven sacraments for writers, our ten commandments, twelve reader wants, thirteen steps of writing, twenty faces of the writer. What now? Not that I need to stick to numbers, and I hadn't intended to, but while gathering material and ordering it for what I thought would be my topic for today, an idea struck, and, yes, it focuses on a number.

I chanced across what one of my former students, the columnist and chronicler of Michael Jordan and the Bulls, Bob Green, wrote in a piece for *Esquire*. He said, "The way I see it, everyone of us in the writing business starts off with precisely the same tools, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. All we can do is try to arrange those twenty-six letters in a different way than anyone else has before." So, my number is twenty-six. My topic is the alphabet, but not an alphabet of letters, one of words. A writer's alphabet of words.

The *A* word is accuracy. Readers may use what you write, may follow your instructions, may be guided by your suggestions, may come or need to believe what you have told them. Don't betray that trust by being inaccurate.

The *B* is for beauty. John Ruskin noted that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless, peacocks and lilies for instance. He was not denigrating the beautiful but praising it in an indirect manner to support his theories on esthetics. But beauty is a gigantic, encompassing word, and almost no matter what you write, it can throb with beauty. And it should.

Peter Jacobi and Jane Ferguson outside the Hall of Christ.

The *C* is for clarity. E.B. White, in a memorial to the legendary editor of *The New Yorker*, Harold Ross, said, "The report of Ross's death came over the telephone in a three-word sentence that somehow managed to embody all the faults that Ross devoted his life to correcting. A grief-stricken friend in Boston, charged with the task of spreading the news but too dazed to talk, sensibly said, 'It's all over.'" He meant that Ross was dead. But the listener took it to mean that the operation was over. Here, in three easy words, were the ambiguity, the euphemistic softness, the verbal infirmity that Harold W. Ross spent his life thrusting at. Ross regarded every sentence as the enemy, and believed that if a man watched closely enough, he would discover the vulnerable spot, the essential weakness. He devoted his life to making the weak strong, a rather specialized form of blood transfusion, to be sure, but one that he believed in with such a consuming passion that his spirit infected others and inspired them and lifted them. While you pray for an editor like that, barring that possibility, make of yourself an editor. Put what you've written away for a while. Return to it. See it at a distance, and then use the blue pencil.

The *D* is for discovery. "What is there that confers the novelist's delight?" asks Mark Twain. "Discovery, yes, discovery. To find a new planet, to invent a new hinge, to find a way to make lightning carry your messages, to be the first, that is my idea." Make discovery happen for people. Make it happen for your reader: a sense of discovery, the new, the strange, the previously unknown or unthought about, the revelation informationally or conceptually.

My *E* introduces energy. Write with muscle. Write with inviting elasticity. Write with another *E* word, enthusiasm. Give your writing spring. Make it inescapable writing because of the force of the author's involvement.

***F*. The word is fun.** Not necessarily humor, although humor can be fun. Not necessarily jokes, although jokes can be fun—but humor. The lighter touch, the brighter touch, the smile-causing touch.

We're moving right along to *G*. That's for generosity. A spiritual term for the writer, generosity. Be generous with research. Be generous with language to savor. Be generous with goodies that I as a reader can take from the book or article.

***H* stands for honesty**—integrity, verisimilitude, truth in packaging.

We come to *I*, and right now I don't refer to the word *I* as self-centeredness. That's a definite no-no for writers. I refer to the letter *I* that introduces the word *imagination*, meant perhaps as in fantasy. Meant perhaps as in bending boundaries. Meant perhaps as in a writer's freedom to dream, to go beyond self and out of self, levitating in the realm of ideas, ideas given wing.

The letter *J* represents my profession, journalism. To practice it we should follow the advice of Joseph Pulitzer, who once said, "Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely

PETER JACOBI

Peter's renown as a compelling speaker and thoughtful critic has spread from newsroom to boardroom to classroom. A professor of journalism at Indiana University since 1985, Peter consults with magazines and corporations, encouraging editors, writers, and CEOs to make their words clear and engaging.

Peter has published articles in *World Book, Saturday Review, The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, Folio, Highlights for Children,* and other periodicals. His two guidebooks—*The Magazine Article: How To Think It, Plan It, Write It* and *Writing with Style: The News Story and the Feature*—are standard reference sources for journalists.

so they will remember it, and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light." I maintain that whether you write nonfiction or fiction, you can benefit from emulating journalistic style. Ernest Hemingway did.

I join Will Rogers in saying, "I didn't meet anyone I didn't like!"

—Marty Kearney, Dalton, PA

The *K* brings us to knowledge, which commences with instruction, the passing along of information. But is that sufficient? Well, knowledge implies information comprehended, information into which meaning has been attached. Knowledge implies an expansive making of sense, a packaging of insight. Knowledge, way showing, door opening.

Well, of course, *L* is for love. The subject doesn't have to be love, physical, metaphysical, or otherwise. It can be, but it doesn't have to be. I'm talking about a love of subject. I'm talking about a love of writing, a love of reader, a love of possibilities—love of the possibility of enriching a reader's treasure trove of knowledge. Love, yes. Love of information. Love of sharing.

The *M* is either for magic or melody, or both. The writer's ability to mesmerize. Hey, that's another *M* word. Words and lines are of lilt, of tilt; words that suggest melody that evoke an aura that's magical, otherworldly, yet also touchable.

Nonconformity is my *N* word. Matisse said: "There is nothing more difficult for a truly creative painter than to paint a rose, because before he can do so, he has first to forget all the roses that were ever painted." Good art, good writing—they are not mimicry. They are not the predictable.

The *O* represents optimism. Too much news, too much in our lives negates. Help the reader to achieve an emotional balance so that he or she doesn't shout from a rooftop, "I can't take this anymore!" Some of what we write should be balm. Help the reader discover a light in the darkness.

Passion. That's my *P* word. Boris Novak, in celebrating International Children's Reading Day in 1997, said: "Adults look at colors, yet do not see them. Adults perceive shapes, yet do not understand their speech. Adults live in light and from light, yet do not notice it at all. Adults cast long shadows, yet do not play with them. Adults take up much (indeed too much) space, yet never just for once marvel at its spaciousness. Adults look at the world with closed eyes. This is why space shrinks, shadows die, light darkens, colors fade, and shapes fall silent. Children are different. Children, with eyes wide open, gaze out at the world and marvel at things. Children play with colors and with shapes. Their play blows away the dust from the faded colors and returns to them the sheen with which they were born. Play brings to life new shapes, unseen and unheard before, fresh in their beauty." For children particularly, we must have passion.

Chris Clark (left) and Kathy Anderson relax at Sunday afternoon's lamb roast.

The *Q* is for questions and our willingness as writers to ask them so that the right information comes to us for use, and it is for our ability as writers to arouse questions within our readers, not as a form of confusion but as a prompter for further, deeper understanding.

My *R* is reserved for resonance. Writing that, because of its elegance or verve, commands not only attention but a place in the reader's memory. Writing that, because of its unique approach to subject matter, brings an emotional melding with the reader. Resonance is responsiveness. Resonance is communion. Resonance brings a writer/reader atonement—a harmony intellectually, or emotionally, or both.

***S* is for sensuality.** "I would have my ears filled with the world's muses," writes Maya Angelou, ". . . the cackle of old folks sitting in the last sunlight, and the whir of busy bees in the early morning."

***T* word is talking.** Writing should talk, be conversational. Converse with me. Talk to me, one to one.

The *U* is for understanding. What you write should in some way induce understanding, shed light or meaning, suggest significance, promote message—nothing necessarily portentious, but with the potential to alter a reader's life in some small way, just by enticing the mind to stray from predictability. Perspective comes into play here, the sharpening or altering of a point of view.

***V* is for voice.** The necessity of voice. With writing we cannot ever become someone else. Yes, we can learn much from other good writers and, I guess, from bad writers, too. We can emulate the good ones, but ultimately if we are to succeed, we must discover and disclose our own voice, our own sense of style, our own particular embrace of language and information. Consider by way of explanation, by way of definition, these words: authentic, nonformulaic, rhythmic, properly detailed, nuanced, musical, magical, bone-and-sinew touching. Consider the show-versus-tell concept. Consider noun- and verb-centered writing. Consider experiential closeness. Consider the startling, the inescapable, the visual, the conversational, the different with a purpose. Consider the vital and the energetic. Consider writing that pulses with a heartbeat of the writer—his soul, her personality—something that cannot be duplicated because it comes from within a someone.

The *W* is for wonder. St. Augustine said, "Let others wrangle, I will wonder." Arouse, wonder, make my life part.

The *X* is for — I cheat a little bit — it's for extra. When you write for children, provide something extra.

The *Y* represents yearning. Cause yearning, satisfaction tinged with dissatisfaction. By that I mean, I want to say, "Give me more." To say, "I can't already be done with this book." To say, "I don't want it to end." Cause that, and you've succeeded.

We get to *Z*. "How does a city fall asleep? One by one it closes its million eyes." So writes Alan Defina in a collection called *When a City Leans Against the Sky*. Now that's a zoom. **My *Z* word, zoom**—to bring a reader close to the situation or scene so that suddenly a thought or a theme crystallizes.

A through *Z*. Your writer's alphabet.

The Book Journey

The Inside Story

PATRICIA LEE GAUCH

I will take you on a journey of discovering a book, but not from the outside, rather from the inside, so that you can see for yourself some of the mysteries of writing and creating a book and of having that book accepted and published, and maybe even staying in print.

Patti Gauch (left) and Kathy Manley discuss literature and writing during a manuscript session.

Let me begin that "once upon a time" with the submission piles in our office. There are in every publishing house piles of unopened brown envelopes with manuscripts in them. Some of them are unsolicited, and they are called "slush piles." Some are from agents and friends. The piles are significantly high at Philomel. There are only three of us. We do it all.

It is a good thing that publishers have these piles because it means that they are looking and searching for good manuscripts. In one of these piles there may be a Newbery, or a manuscript for a Caldecott, an ALA best book, or a book that will change a child's life. At the same time, relentless piles are a bad thing because there is no way an editor can read them all. It's impossible.

Editors use editorial assistants, interns, friends of the department, any interested good reader to get through the piles to screen, to discover that amazing manuscript.

And so, almost two years ago—when this story began—I found on my desk a manuscript called *The Muffin Child.*

Actually, intern Regi Diverio found *The Muffin Child.* She sifted it out of a pile. And this is what her note read—something like this, "this is strange and wonderful. In a way it is simply about a village versus a young girl who has lost her parents." But, she wrote, "The girl, her name is Tanya, survives in such an original way: by making and selling muffins! And there is a larger story of prejudice and jealousy that will rivet you. Every word is music, and it is not a perfect story, but I have finished reading the manuscript and I cannot stop thinking about it."

Anytime I read a summary on a manuscript by a reader, I am looking carefully at the words the reader uses. Hot words, you could call them. This note had several: the story was strange and wonderful; the language appeared to be musical. Ah, probably then, the story had "voice" (nothing is more important than voice). The protagonist appeared to be brave; she seemed to say yes to life! And perhaps as important as anything else, the story was original. Thank goodness. In the manuscripts that we get, perhaps one in two hundred are original, and perhaps one in five hundred are truly original.

I took the gray box that the manuscript had come in home that night. And the next day I curled up on my overstuffed couch in the garden room, let spring breezes come in through the window, and began to read.

I settled my feet under me and read the entire novel that afternoon.

I closed the cover on the last page. The novel is a first novel. It is not perfect. It goes on fifty pages too long. Some of the scenes are too graphic and too earthy. But there is something here. I can feel it in my bones.

The next day I come into the office feeling that I—like Regi—have discovered a most original novel. I am excited! I make copies of *The Muffin Child* and hand them out to my young editor, Michael Green, a wonderful reader. Meanwhile I call Edy Selman, the agent (I already have had the manuscript four months!). "Edy," I say, "I am interested in *The Muffin Child,* I am trying to figure out if I should take it. Give me some time, can you?"

There were earlier times for editors, when in their creaky, dusty noncorporate offices they said casually, "I'll try that manuscript" or "This story is nice,

PATRICIA LEE GAUCH

Patricia has developed and published some of the finest children's literature from novice and veteran authors in her capacity as editorial director of Philomel Books.

Patricia is the author of the Christina Katerina books, including *Christina Katerina and the Great Bear Train* and *Christina Katerina and Fats and the Great Neighborhood War.* Two of her earlier historical novels, *This Time, Tempe Wick?* and *Thunder at Gettysburg,* remain popular. In 1997, *Tanya and the Magic Wardrobe* was published by Philomel.

I'll do it." But, while I believe in my heart that editors themselves have stayed the same, times are different. It costs money to produce a book, thousands of dollars. And an editor no longer has the luxury of being wrong! So she or he can take risks, but they'd better be good ones. I feel that pressure.

Michael came back four days later to say that he really didn't like the book. My heart sank. The writing was good, but he felt that when the men of the village started to sneak out to buy the muffins from Tanya, it was veiled prostitution. Jennifer hated the cynical villagers, and she felt that the ending went on fifty pages too long. Thumbs down.

There's always time for ice cream and conversation on Chautauqua's Bestor Plaza.

So now Regi and I loved the manuscript; Michael and Jennifer didn't. But you see, this is what I want to share with you. Because in the end, while an editor might hear what other people have to say, in the end, the editor's job is sitting on a porch, feet curled up, paying attention to her own gut. I read the book again. I could not let it go! It made my heart sing. And so, without support from my immediate staff, I called the author, Stephen Menick, a first-time author, and said, "I would like to work with you on this novel. Are you interested?"

Stephen Menick is a film writer and producer for the Red Cross in Washington, D.C. He is married to a woman who grew up in Serbia; her name is Tanya. He had always written, but now, forty-five or so, he has decided to begin to write novels that he has always wanted to write. He writes on Saturdays and Sundays and in the middle of the night weekdays. I am not offering him a contract, but I want him to rewrite. How can I do that? The tradeoff in my mind is that I give him my editor's eye. He will give me his writer's all. If in the end it doesn't work for me, I have still given him hours of work, advice, and perhaps the next leg up. If it works, we are on our way. I know again in my bones that there is something powerful here. Will Stephen buy my argument?

Stephen says yes, maybe because his agent Edy told him to trust me.

Everything takes time. During the next month I am pulled by books already in progress, emergencies on press, artists who are late, but I write notes on the manuscript page by page. I sense problems, but I do not often give the author answers. I rather ask him questions. I do not rewrite the author's words. They are precious, and I am trying to protect them. I am trying to protect his voice. When I am done, I write a five-page editorial note, summarizing my points, pulling my ideas together, trying to be concise and encouraging. I worry: have I said it well enough, will he understand?

Criticism is never easy, no matter how kind the voice. And in this case, kindness is not the question. Enabling him is the question.

Over a year later, two full rewrites later, tugs of war later, phone calls later (I have never met the author yet!), I have a *Muffin Child* on my lap that I think is extraordinary. I have read this final draft, and I know that it is special. I know that I will be up against reviewers who may find it too unusual, but I know in my heart that it is literature, that the reading of it has changed my heartbeat. I call Stephen directly, not the agent Edy, to say: "Stephen, I want to publish this mad, haunting, beautiful book."

Now, take a breath. That gives you a glimpse of the accepting process—the humanity of it, the uncertainties. It lets you see an editor under the microscope. What I want to share with you now is exactly what I liked in the book. How often I am asked, what do you look for in a book? Indeed, what DID I see in *The Muffin Child*, even in the earliest manuscript? Perhaps in seeing what I saw, you will find something for yourself.

1) To begin, something enchanted me on the first page! At times that enchantment comes from an incident so startling that a reader pays attention. It was the words that enchanted me, the utter simplicity and beauty of words, the organic feel of them—barely an adjective among them. Nor was it a group of sentences arranged grammatically to create a perfect paragraph; they were chaotic, almost like breathing in crisis, yet they created Voice, true Voice, and they brought the focus powerfully to the girl, Tanya, almost like a camera panning in on a main character in a first dramatic moment. The words were saying to me: "Here in this crisis, with mother and father being torn away by a river, and a cow on the other side, and a river under her, is Tanya. Meet her! She is real."

Stephen saw that with his writer's eye—the apples in her arms and the water swelling under the bridge in the first place, and then he found the words "the apples falling from her arm" and "the river looking like a hump of white water over a stone in a mountain stream."

We are so busy writing, I wonder sometimes if we as writers take enough time to see. To observe life in the smallest detail. To see life anew. It is not only that these tiny observations are wondrous to read, it is the accumulation of those miniature moments involving person and place that convince the reader a story is authentic, that it is true.

2) What convinced me next to pay

attention to this book? By the end of chapter one, I was quite literally pulled into the book, turning the pages so quickly I didn't want to answer the phone. How did the author do this? There is an easy answer or two. There was tension, there were problems, I was worried—turning the page to find out what would happen.

Patti Gauch and Will Boggs at the lamb roast

But maybe, for the writer, there is a way to look at it that is simpler and easier to digest. There is almost a single question that permeates the book, that demands in the most passionate terms an answer. Great friend of young writers and great and dear friend of Chautauqua Pam Conrad used to call it The GDQ, The Great Dramatic Question. A question bound up not only with some outside action but bound up intimately with what the main character is!

It is events played against a great dramatic question that produce tension. The Great Dramatic Question in *The Muffin Child* is, Can Tanya survive without her parents? She is tested first by her own refusal to see. She will not face the fact that her mother and father are almost certainly dead. The wagon has taken them downstream, she tells herself. They are finding their way back, she tells herself. The wagon flowed all the way to the sea; it will take them several days to find their way back ac countryside. She is tested by the villagers, who swarm down on her and her parents' apple-producing, wheat producing farm, assuring her sweetly that they are only interested in her welfare, but who eye her parents' ripening fields.

I loved the surprising turns in Stephen Menick's story. I could not predict what Tanya would do next or what the villagers would do next. With The Great Dramatic Question under my skin, playing against everything that happened, that unpredictability drew me, panting, into the story, saying to myself: And now what is going to happen?

3) Next, I was enchanted by the strange and faraway "place" in the book. The "place" actually seemed to become a character.

It is a lovely debate to see what comes first in an author's mind, the place or the character. To the writer who may see both the place and the person as antagonists, viable characters, it is hard to choose. Probably place and situation and character come hand in hand. But there is no question that the character thrives in a powerful, focused, original place.

This is Tanya, who lives in "some country in the Balkans," who is facing an entire village of people that that strange and mysterious place helped create, villagers who weasel around her farm looking for a way to steal it. This environment is created not just by trees and rivers that nurture and run wild but by animals that nurture and people who run wild as well. It is so original it provides a seething energy of its own.

4) Next, my interest never flagged, long past the first chapters. I was quite simply brought to the edge of my seat by it until the end.

E.M. Forster wrote in *Aspects of a Novel* that in a powerful novel there is a ticking clock, that sense of time running out, that puts the main character under terrible and increasing pressure. In *The Muffin Child*, Tanya has no food except the uncut wheat of her field and some little flour in the cupboards and milk from Milenka, her cow. With the villagers now angry that she turned their kind offers down, pressing her, with her own resources threatened, time is running out.

It is exactly this time box that the writer creates that spurs the girl to come up with her own solution of making muffins. But the author is not content with this, he tightens the time box. The villagers are not going to tolerate her making muffins. They mistrust her. Still the author is not satisfied. The gypsies come to her property and she sees their shadows at the back of her fields.

There is an accumulation of forces moving against Tanya. It is relentless. I cannot tell you how many manuscripts I have read that have no middle. This is the stuff of "middle." Events are adding up. Time is running out.

Chautauqua was a magical week. It gave me fertilizer for a fallow writing spell. It enabled me to make some desperately needed connections with others who work at home.

—Andrea Early, Charlestown, MA

5) Next, while certainly the sense of time running out is excruciating in *The Muffin Child*, I believe my inability to put the book down had something to do not just with event, but with the music in this book. I have long suspected that the best books have a musical heart. It is not Tchaikovsky, but it penetrates the sentences and words of the author as dramatically, driving story.

At the start of a book the music is slow, *legato*, like the early movements of a concerto. It moves up to *allegro*. It may return briefly to *adagio*, but it builds and builds, *vivace*, and just as all of the orchestra's instruments will be gathered in for the *crescendo*, for the climax, so the author gathers his words.

I think of the word ecstasy. At the exquisite point when story is drawn together, it is like music but beyond music, something that goes beyond sound of any kind to a free-floating ecstasy. That point of ecstasy is the place where writer and reader meet.

That's the feeling we have when as writers we connect with a strand of emotion so powerful we don't even know where the words are coming

from; they are simply coming. And we know we have to trust them, follow them to the end. And if we are lucky at the end of them, there is a turn, a moment of recognition, a moment of understanding so profound that we as writers are even shaken. It is the risk of being there.

It is always a special time of year for me—a time to put my ideas together, assess what I have been thinking—and learning. And I always learn from the conferees, too, invariably.

—Patricia Lee Gauch, Hyde Park, NY

The story ends in a flute of words, an oboe of words, a brave, plaintive melody that sings.

When I reread the ending lately, I found it so exquisite, so understated that it broke my heart with its beauty. That is how powerful an ending can be—so perfect that it seems to connect with some cosmic rightness of things. I was enchanted, but my story is not over.

A good book is still a subjective matter. There is no cosmic chorus of reviewers created by some godly hand, who know what is good and what is only so-so. The point is, it is subjective. If the stars are in the right configuration, *The Muffin Child* will find its way alone, and be celebrated.

But the truth is, hype in this industry informs all too many decisions. And when I finally held *The Muffin Child* galleys in my hand, more suspicious of the establishment than ever, I was not satisfied to let it find its own way. There is no money put aside for a first novel unless it is a blockbuster fantasy. So, I tried to figure out what I could do to go a little way with this novel I so loved.

I first sent the manuscript to Jewell Stoddard, booklover and manager of the wonderful Cheshire Cat bookstore. And I sent it to Natalie Babbit. I got good quotes from them that I could use on the galleys.

I wrote down all of the important librarians that I had met at recent parties. I scraped my own memory of people I thought could make a difference, and then determined personally to send a book to each of them.

I began to write notes to people I know to send with the galleys. The note can't be pushy. I can't give my opinion. How can I find the right words that say humbly I am excited about this book.

It is now May, then June. Reviews will be coming out. I go to the American Library Association convention, and along with the novels of known authors, I put copies of *The Muffin Child* on the booth counters. I have a picture of Stephen on the book cover. And like meeting someone on a village green, I chat with people who stop by, sharing with them my excitement over this new book.

"People are talking about *The Muffin Child*," I say. "Perhaps I can get you a copy." And I pass out twenty bound galleys to people passing by.

At the Penguin cocktail party that night, I take shy, slightly overwhelmed Stephen Menick and his wife, and I introduce him to authors and other editors and critics. And I notice that some authors, now published, have no time for him, a first-time novelist, and some have time, remembering. But I am thinking that if only one or two people remember the name of the book, that is a good thing.

It is mid-July now. I have had a three-year love affair with this book. Have I done enough? I take a deep breath. I say to myself, it is never enough. It is a good book; it will find its way.

That is the truth. And so knowing I can do no more, I put my files away and wait.

Perhaps now you can see why I wanted to share all of this with you. I am not unique in this industry. This is what is happening. Good books are being written. You can write that good book.

At the core of the good book are first pages that demand the reader's attention; characters that are round and full of life; a great dramatic question that seizes us in its originality and in its thrust; an accumulation of event played against a ticking clock that hardly allows us to breathe with anticipation; language that sings in its observation and simplicity and originality; passion that permeates the book almost musically but that, when we think that we cannot take one more moment of the tension, rises to ecstasy; and an ending that makes us feel that we surely are linked to some universal truth.

Even so, good books may not find their way in a world that is being overpopulated with books. Human beings—editors, booksellers, librarians, teachers—need to be their friends, and that takes time. Why don't editors read more manuscripts? Why don't they get back to writers more quickly? Why don't they answer our letters? Because they are loving books into existence with everything they have at their disposal. And that takes time. Work time, train time, Saturday time, Sunday time.

All for a good story.

From left to right, Donna LaBar, Kate Yerkes, Helen Gotkowitz, and Marianne Mitchell.

The Current State of Children's Book Publishing

JAMES CROSS GIBLIN

Children's book publishing breaks down into three basic segments: picture books, fiction, and nonfiction. Let's examine the current state of each of these segments, starting with NONFICTION.

The most obvious nonfiction trend today is the proliferation of series books—glossy, heavily illustrated titles for every age group, on subjects ranging from dinosaurs to ancient Rome to the latest advances in space exploration. Dorling Kindersley pioneered this type of series a dozen or so years ago, and other publishers have followed suit with similar series of their own. They have won wide acceptance in the bookstore market and can also be found in many school and public libraries.

Unfortunately, these series offer only limited opportunities to new writers. Many of them originate abroad, with the majority coming from England. Whether they're produced overseas or in this country, they almost always start with the concept and illustrations. The text is added later, and is often little more than a succession of captions. These are frequently composed by a staff writer in the publishing house or by a freelancer who is known for handling such assignments. Rarely does the job go to a newcomer.

Happily, there's another type of nonfiction series that is far more open to free-lance writers, both new and established. Unlike the Dorling Kindersley books, these series are directed almost exclusively to school and public libraries. In fact, some of the series are not available for sale in bookstores. All sorts of titles are published in these series—biographies, histories, science. The books often relate closely to the social studies and science curricula, and are pitched to specific grade levels in which a particular topic is discussed; for example, sixth grade, the study of ancient Egypt.

Jim Giblin discusses the current state of children's publishing at the Wednesday morning General Session.

Among the active publishers in this field are Enslow Books, Millbrook Press, and Twenty-First Century Books. If you think you'd like to try your hand at a nonfiction book for one of their series, study their current catalog. Decide where your knowledge and talents might fit in, and propose an idea for a book to the series editor. At the same time, do some preliminary research so you'll be able to write sample material for the book if the editor requests it.

Be flexible. A few years ago, I worked at a writers' conference with a new writer named Barbara Kramer, who had an interesting sample chapter for a book about women lighthouse keepers. At my suggestion, she submitted the chapter to Enslow Books. They weren't interested in the lighthouse project, but they liked Barbara's writing style and invited her to write a biography of Alice Walker for one of their series. Now she has contracts for four more books.

There also continues to be a strong nonfiction market for individual titles, but it can be a harder one to crack than the series market. To succeed, you'll need a fresh topic or a unique approach to a familiar one. And your idea should lend itself to striking illustrations. An example is Russell Freedman's biography of Abraham Lincoln, which was the first to be illustrated extensively with archival photographs.

A recent nonfiction trend worth noting is the use of a picture-book format in books aimed at older children. Some examples of this trend that you might want to examine are Peter Sis's biography of Galileo, *Starry Messenger*; Diane Stanley's and Peter Vennema's books, including *Cleopatra* and *Bard of Avon*; Joanna Cole's Magic School Bus books; and my own picture-book biography of Thomas Jefferson. The last book was written for second- and third-graders, but interestingly enough much of my fan mail has come from sixth and seventh graders.

Evidence such as this makes me think the trend toward nonfiction picture books for older readers will continue and strengthen. For better or worse, it's a reflection of our society in which more and more youngsters are reading below their grade level, and even the brightest kids expect a wide array of graphics.

The Children's Division of the American Library Association last month presented its Laura Ingalls Wilder Award to a nonfiction writer, Russell Freedman. This award, given only every three years, is for a body of work. Its recipients in the past have included such outstanding children's book creators as Virginia Hamilton, Maurice Sendak, Marcia Brown, and E.B. White.

In a profile published in *Horn Book* magazine along with his Wilder acceptance speech, Russell was quoted as saying: "A nonfiction children's book requires concision, selection, judgment, lucidity, unwavering focus, and the most artful use of language and storytelling techniques. I regard such books as a specialized and demanding art form."

So, obviously, do many critics and evaluators today. That's heartening to

JAMES CROSS GIBLIN

As the former editor in chief of Clarion Books, Jim has discovered, encouraged, and published many previously unknown authors and illustrators. Now he divides his time between his own writing and his ongoing duties as contributing editor at Clarion. Jim's nonfiction for children is considered a standard of the genre. In 1996, he received the Washington Post-Children's Book Guild Award for his body of nonfiction work. Twelve of his books have been named Notable Children's Books by the American Library Association.

all of us, who, in our own ways, strive to write artful nonfiction.

The current trends in FICTION resemble those prevailing in the nonfiction area. The bookstore market is dominated by popular series—usually published in paperback—such as the Goosebumps series of horror stories (and its many imitators), the Babysitters Club series, the Polk Street School series, and countless others that come and go as kids' tastes and interests change.

Eight experts—Andy Gutelle, Rosanna Hansen, Andy Boyles, Laurence Pringle, Brent Farmer, Lionel Bender, and Susan Tejada—got together at Thursday morning's panel to promote the art of nonfiction. Carolyn Yoder (rear) moderated.

The key to a successful series seems to be either a strong character or group of characters, like the Babysitters, or a strong concept, like the horror theme in the Goosebumps books. But it can be a tough market for a beginning writer to get into. Often the idea for a new series is cooked up by the editor and the marketing people at a publishing house, who then approach an established writer they know to carry it out.

If you have what you think is a promising idea for a series, by all means try it with a publisher like Scholastic or Bantam Doubleday Dell that specializes in series books. But don't expect that you'll travel a straight and speedy road from submission to publication. The competition is fierce. Chances are you'll be better off investing your time and energy in an individual fiction title that will be published first in hardcover—and then, perhaps, in a paperback reprint.

In the general fiction field, there seems to be a growing market for short novels for the 8-11 and 12-14 age groups. This may be another reflection of the trend toward shorter nonfiction books. Manuscripts for the shorter novels usually run from 90 to 120 pages, and are divided into fairly brief chapters.

(I should inject a cautionary reminder here: Don't ever make length the chief consideration when writing a novel. If your story needs to be longer to achieve its full potential, by all means let it have the pages it requires.)

There continues to be a large audience of upper-elementary-age readers for well-turned ghost stories and mysteries. A writer on the Clarion list, Mary Downing Hahn, has enjoyed great success in this area with such ghost stories as *Wait Till Helen Comes* and *Time for Andrew*. Why are her books so popular? It's probably because they have likable characters, strong plots, and vivid descriptive passages. And they generate a high degree of suspense without resorting to blatant horror effects or violence.

There's room for historical fiction and fantasy titles, too. But the characters in historical novels must make an immediate emotional connection with today's readers. The heroines of Karen Cushman's award-winning novels, *Catherine, Called Birdy* and *The Midwife's Apprentice*, are examples of characters who do this from the very first page.

Fantasies should be geared to contemporary concerns also, even if they take place in the distant past, the far future, or on another planet. And, like the best historical fiction, they should have characters with whom young readers can identify quickly and easily.

I've noticed that a new type of young adult fiction seems to be evolving slowly but steadily. This is the mature sort of story that can be appreciated by proficient readers of eleven, but that does not seem "childish" to slower readers of thirteen or fourteen and up. Many of Gary Paulsen's novels fit into this category, as do the books of writers like Jacqueline Woodson, Bruce Brooks, and Francesca Lia Block. Their stories often deal with coming-of-age themes, and treat the subject matter more frankly and openly than was the case in the past. Some of the plots are dramatic, even tragic; others are humorous. Whatever the tone, issues of sexuality and morality are addressed, and pat answers are avoided.

A considerable number of stories like this have been published recently, but there appears to be room for more—as long as they center on freshly

Getting in Touch

A number of nonprofit organizations providing goods and services of use to writers were cited in several workshop sessions. For the convenience of those who might want to get in touch with one of those organizations, we offer the following information, beginning with Chautauqua itself:

- **CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION**
  The Institution has available information for anyone considering a visit: full details on the summer-program lectures, music, plays, and operas. Also information on lodgings is available. Chautauqua, NY 14722. Tel. 716-357-6200.
  Or visit the Chautauqua website: http://www.chautauqua-inst.org/
- **ROGER TORY PETERSON INSTITUTE OF NATURAL HISTORY** 311 Curtis Street, Jamestown, NY 14701-9620.
  Tel. 716-665-2473. Fax 716-665-3794.
- **SOCIETY OF CHILDREN'S BOOK WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS (SCBWI)** 22736 Vanowen St. #106, West Hills, CA 91307. Tel. 818-888-8760.
- **U.S. BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (USBBY), U.S. CHAPTER OF IBBY** c/o International Reading Association, P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. Tel. 302-731-1600, Ext. 274.

observed situations and are written with skill and insight.

That's really the watchword for all types of fiction writing at the moment. Whatever genre you choose to work in, you'll need to come up with a fresh and unusual story situation, and then write it with imagination and a firm sense of craft. There's less room than ever in the hardcover marketplace for the sort of competent (if undistinguished) novel that once appeared on many lists.

Now let's turn our attention to PICTURE BOOKS. I'll begin the discussion with a couple of statements that I'm sure you won't be happy to hear: too many picture-book stories are being written. And far too many picture books are being published.

There's an understandable explanation for the latter situation. As the bookstore market for children's books expanded in recent years, publishers scurried to get a bigger share of it by publishing more books. The number of new picture books increased dramatically because it's a known fact that picture books comprise an especially large proportion of the children's books sold in bookstores.

The result: bookstore shelves became crowded with new retellings of the same old folktales and fairy tales, with overly elaborate stories of more interest to adults than to children and with flimsy texts whose only excuse for publication seemed to be that they provided a vehicle—weak though it might be—for an illustrator to display his or her talents. However, a problem soon surfaced: the market simply couldn't absorb the vast number of new titles that were being published. Returns of unsold books soared; a publisher might confidently print a first edition of ten thousand copies of a picture book only to end up with a final sale, after returns from bookstores and wholesalers, of only three thousand copies. In response to this unpleasant reality, what was a publisher to do? The answer: issue fewer picture books and print them in smaller quantities.

Meanwhile, returning to my first statement, writers all over the country have been busy grinding out what they thought were picture-book manuscripts and flooding editorial offices with them. Some of the writers may have been [illegible]d by articles they'd read about the boom in the bookstore market. But others were probably acting on a mistaken assumption that many beginning writers for children have made through the years—namely, that picture books texts are short and consequently easy to write. Nothing could be further from the truth. Especially not today.

But I'm happy to report that there's a more positive aspect to the current publishing scene as far as picture books are concerned. Although the chances of a writer placing a routine new story or retelling are less than zero, editors are eager to find picture-book texts with freshness, charm, and genuine child appeal. And those houses that still accept unagented submissions are definitely open to gifted newcomers.

All aboard the Chautauqua Belle on Tuesday night are full of smiles and expectations.

What exactly is meant by "child appeal"? Put in the simplest terms, it's a book children like—and fortunately for writers, children like many different types of picture-book stories: guessing games, animal fantasies, rhyming stories, folktales, stories set in some long-ago time, and stories set in the here-and-now. But whatever the genre, the story must have lively, active characters and an involving plot.

Some recent picture books that possess these qualities include Kevin Henkes's delightful story *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* and Susan Meddaugh's witty stories about Martha the talking dog. A true master of the picture book form is Eve Bunting.

Eve also helped to pioneer a new type of picture-book story that ventured into hitherto unexplored territory. Such stories dramatize serious contemporary issues in terms young children can understand. A prime example is Eve's Caldecott-winning *Smoky Night*, set amid the violence of an urban riot.

Stories like this have won an enthusiastic readership—and at the same time have aroused considerable controversy. Some critics feel there's no need to expose young children to life's harsher realities. Why not let them enjoy their innocence as long as possible? Supporters, on the other hand, argue that this innocence is already being violated by television, which many children watch for hours each day. Sensitive, well-written books, they say, can help to counterbalance television's more pernicious effects.

This controversy is not likely to die down any time soon. Meanwhile, other stories have extended the boundaries of the picture book even further.

If realistic stories like Eve Bunting's *Smoky Night* stretch the picture-book genre, books like *Making Up Megaboy* by Virgina Walter really push the envelope. *School Library Journal* called it a "breakthrough book" and gave it a starred review. But the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* thought it was clearly inappropriate for the picture-book audience and too thinly developed to qualify as a novel for older children. The *Bulletin* rated it "Marginal," its next-to-lowest rating.

This divergence of opinion doesn't surprise me. Many librarians and teachers, not to mention parents, are fearful of books for whatever age group that dare to confront the more painful aspects of contemporary life. They'd rather stick with the tried and true—with "safe" books that raise no troubling questions.

But "safe" books are like popcorn and tortilla chips. They may taste good at the moment, but they don't often provide lasting nourishment. It's books like *Making Up Megaboy* that stir readers and provoke discussion. And it's groundbreaking books like them and *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Harriet the Spy*, and

Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret that eventually come to be recognized as contemporary classics.

Terrence McNally, the prize-winning playwright, was speaking this past May to an audience of aspiring dramatists. But the advice he offered them is just as applicable to you and other authors of children's books. "Write plays that matter," McNally said. "Raise the stakes. Shout, yell, holler, but make yourself heard. . . . If a play isn't worth dying for, maybe it isn't worth writing."

The latter point may seem a bit extreme if you're writing a picture book about a turtle or a flock of sheep. But the main thrust of McNally's remarks is right on target. If you're willing to take risks in terms of subject matter and approach, you're much more likely to attract the attention of a perceptive editor. And if you dare to write books that break new ground, you're far more likely to win the hearts and minds of young readers . . . not just in the year of publication, but for many years to come.

Publishing Trends

JUDY O'MALLEY AND JEWELL STODDARD

Judy: I guess my first reaction to the topic when it was suggested was that I'm not sure that there is such an animal as a trend in children's publishing. I think we can identify ideas that we see surfacing. I don't think authors or publishers begin or pick up on trends consciously. If something works, we start seeing a bunch of those. And I think sometimes when something doesn't work, we still keep seeing a bunch of things that might have worked. And some work better than others.

Judy O'Malley (left) and Erin Brown take to one of Chautauqua's many outside benches to talk literature.

Jewell: Wherever I travel, I hear lots and lots of people who are very discouraged by the impact of mergers of publishers, their accepting and cutting of lists, and their turning everything into merchandise and this word called product. And, actually, some of the publishers don't talk to me about products as something I'm manufacturing, but product as this kind of mystical thing out there that's going to make them a great deal of money. The wonderful backlist is a thing I really see as a trend. The publishers are mining and mining and mining until you hardly recognize them. *Good Night Moon* now comes out in hardback, paperback, board back, a book-cassette package, board-book-cassette package.

Conclusions

The smaller publishers are building their bases on riskier books.

For every trend, you can almost always find a countertrend. Trends go in all directions. Different groups of books appeal to different groups of people.

Some more popular themes are nostalgic books, especially those where adults write about their lives as children.

One major point: nonfiction has improved much over the last ten years. Multicultural novels and nonfiction have a much greater level of sophistication than ten or twenty years ago. The text in many nonfiction books is equal in weight to the visuals—more integration. Years ago, the field sort of exploded. There were many folktales, and a lot of factual errors, and errors of just simple things—of social situations that wouldn't have occurred or that a person did not know well enough to write about. Now there are more stories that are inside the culture and then move out.

The picture book has become more complex. It is also more crafted. Literary devices and literary techniques and genres are taught using picture books.

Gimmickry has proliferated in all directions.

JUDITH O'MALLEY

Judith is editor of *Book Links: Connecting Books, Libraries, and Classrooms,* publication of the American Library Association. *Book Links* is intended for school library specialists, teachers, children's librarians, and parents who are concerned about connecting quality children's books with the curriculum.

Before becoming *Book Links* editor in 1996, Judith worked as associate editor for H.W. Wilson, where she handled acquisitions and professional books for children's librarians and teachers.

JEWELL STODDARD

Jewell and three of her friends started the Cheshire Cat Book Store in Washington, D.C. In 1977, it was a daring enterprise to open a book store specializing in children's books. More than twenty years later, the store continues to play an important role in the lives of children—and in the lives of the teachers, librarians, and others involved in the literacy movement.

Jewell served on the Library of Congress Books for Children Committee for many years. In 1994, she was a member of the Caldecott Award Committee.

Nonfiction for a Day—for a Lifetime!

The Nonfiction Easy Reader

ROSANNA HANSEN

I'm here at the conference wearing two hats. The first is my author hat. I've written ten nonfiction books for kids. The subjects I usually write on are nature and science—the solar system, astronauts, dinosaurs, and other topics of that kind.

I also wear another hat, what I call my day job. In that capacity I'm publisher and editor in chief of children's books for Reader's Digest. In talking to some of you during the week, I found some of you were surprised to find Reader's Digest has children's books. Our division has been around for six years. We specialize in titles from toddler books up through age six, and then we have some books from age six to twelve.

Rosanna Hansen (right) looks on as Patricia McKissack (center) and Judy O'Malley discuss a children's book.

Our market specialty is interactive books: books that have some sort of device, such as lift-the-flaps, pop-ups, or diecuts. We also have a line of science books that is one of my favorites, and on those we have acetate windows. As you layer it, you create the whole human body. We also do the solar system that way. Interactive books are about seventy percent of our list, and what we are looking to do now is build out into other areas of publishing.

So, as the publisher, one of my jobs is to watch the trends in the industry and to see what's meeting with success in the bookstore market. One interesting trend we've been watching lately is the growth of series. That's something that has really been gaining in popularity over the years.

A number of major trade publishers have entered that market, which is something new. That used to be more the school and library market in hardcover and, of course, in the classroom. But the growth of trade paperback-reading programs has been an interesting trend in bookstores lately.

These readers have a standard format with a six-by-nine-inch trim size. They need to fit in the rack in the stores, which is designed for six-by-nine-inch books. It's interesting how much marketing often drives publishing, and this trim size is really a prime example.

There's an example in the Chautauqua Bookstore. The rack says Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and the slots are designed for six-by-nine-inch books. You can fit smaller books, but you can't easily fit a larger book. So that kind of point-purchase display can often dictate what kind of size you're working with.

What I want to talk about specifically is nonfiction Easy Readers. An Easy Reader is a book for young children who are just learning to read. The books have easy words, often with a controlled vocabulary. They have simple sentences, and they're subject usually to a readability check. Usually when you do one of these series you work with someone who is an expert in curriculum development. And even though these books aren't necessarily intended for the classroom, we want to make sure they are appropriate and helpful to children learning to read. So we work with reading experts and make sure that they're correctly done. Nonfiction Easy Readers are a little known area of Easy Readers, and I think they are very interesting.

Easy Reader series are often done in levels. Level-one books are usually done with a very controlled word count. They're often twenty words up to fifty words. We're working with a word count of fifty words, which isn't as easy as it sounds. It's hard to do a good story in fifty words. The level-one books are often done in rhyme, or they're often done as a poem rather than a story. If a level-one book is done as a story, it has to be brief.

When you get to level two, the nonfiction readers begin to appear. Again, you're working with a controlled word count. It might be eighty to one hundred words at that level. This is where you start to see some of the interesting nonfiction topics; for example, there are a lot of books out on animals—gorillas, sharks, whales, different kinds of insects, creepy spiders, and so forth.

Disaster books are also popular in the Easy Readers. There are a couple on the *Titanic*, and interestingly the books were out before the movie. There's a book on Pompeii called *Pompeii: Buried Alive*. There are books on volcanoes and other natural forces, tidal waves, and things like that. The idea is to have something with enough inherent interest for children that can be told in a simple and exciting story.

Another category that is popular for easy readers is sports. There are books out on soccer, baseball, women's sports, and so forth.

I think that gives you a brief overview of this kind of reader. I'm working on a series of readers now, and it's a lot of fun. I think it's like a big puzzle. You have a lot of restrictions. You have a controlled vocabulary with a word list. You have a limited word count. It's like playing a tough game of tennis with the net up. You have a lot of restrictions, and you have to put the puzzle together and make the book work in every way. It has to be easy to read, have strong illustrations, and be interesting for children.

ROSANNA HANSEN

Rosanna was recently promoted to group publisher for Reader's Digest Young Families. In addition to directing the publishing program for the U.S. branch of the Reader's Digest children's book group, Joshua Morris Publishing, she also oversees the publishing program at Victoria House, the British division. She has written ten books for children. Her most recent title, *Astronauts Today*, was published by Random House in the fall of 1998.

The Many Dimensions of Research

LAURENCE PRINGLE

I want to say something about research. This applies to both fiction and nonfiction. Whenever anyone is reading a story or an article or a book, there's a bond between the reader and the writer. And one of the ways the bond can be broken is when the reader comes upon something he or she knows is untrue. So fiction writers sometimes have to do quite a bit of research. In nonfiction it is of course critical, and I think most people who tend to write nonfiction have a burning curiosity and just love research. I know that's the main reason I write. I have a quote here from Patricia Lauber, who is a distinguished author of nonfiction over the decades, and she refers to a science book, but keep in mind that what she says applies to a nonfiction article, or book, and somewhat perhaps to fiction. She says, "The writer of a science book needs a good idea, one that arouses personal enthusiasm and is also suitable for a particular age group. Research has to be both broad and deep. Preferably back to primary sources and interviews with scientists. I'm not sure about other people, but I do know that scientists build traps for the unwary. For scientists bring various dimensions, conflicting opinions, and some general assumptions that will somehow come to be presented as fact."

Ruth Major (left) and Larry Pringle at the lamb roast.

I want to give you an example from research I have done, and some of the good news and bad news of what can happen. Back in 1986, African bees, a.k.a. killer bees, were in Costa Rica, close to entering Mexico, and I wrote a book about them at that point. And then in 1990, I revised the book because some people were predicting that these bees would be entering the United States under their own power, entering Texas from Mexico. It was June of 1990, and it was a last opportunity to change the text of the book, including especially the first sentence. The first sentence said that killer bees came from Mexico into Texas in the fall of 1990. It turned out there was a drought for a couple of years in Mexico, and there was not much flowering going on in the desert and not much nectar for the bees, and they seemed to have slowed down quite a bit. Some entomologists were saying no, they won't reach the U.S. until 1992 or even 1993. I worried about that first sentence. So I called an expert at the University of Kansas. He was the expert I relied on most, though I talked to others, and read others, and so forth. I spoke to him, and he acknowledged that, yes, there wasn't much flowering going on, and yes, the bees seemed to have slowed down. And I mentioned other entomologists saying that the killer bees would not cross till 1992, my worry about that first sentence. And he said, "I trust the bees more than the experts." And in October of 1990, the first colony of killer bees was found in Texas. They had crossed over. So sometimes there are experts that disagree in the books you read and the articles you read. And in your research you do find clashes about some things. I have no magic formula to offer you to help you resolve these things. You just have to assume that one is more authoritative and wiser than the others.

A book I'm working on now is on the green darner dragonfly, and I began on it as I usually do when I start a new subject. I begin with popular literature. I look over children's books that are already published and articles in *Smithsonian*, *Natural History*, and popular science magazines. I thought I had a really good overview of the life of a green darner dragonfly, and I made an outline. But then in a span of three days I talked to an entomologist in Rhode Island, one in New York State, and one at Rutgers University in New Jersey. And I had to go back and change my outline because there was vital information that was not in the sources I mentioned. So that can happen also. It's really important for you to go deeper than the popular level on subjects, to talk to experts or write to them, or at least get to their books.

Your research should be broad and deep. Then comes the question of what you pick out of all the stuff you have read or learned in interviews. What are the important ideas? In a children's book or article you can't go on and on forever. You have to pick what any adult or child would like to know about something or should know about something. When you're writing for children you zero in on those details or anecdotes that have child appeal, and for that you just have sort of a personal interview with your inner child.

LAURENCE PRINGLE

Larry began his career as many authors do—writing during precious spare moments, receiving his share of rejections as well as a few acceptances from magazines that paid little or nothing. He wanted to be a wildlife biologist, but the writer's life appealed to him as well.

After Larry had his first book published, he decided in 1970 to become a full-time free-lancer. His eighty-fourth book, *One Room School*, was published this year. Two recent titles include *An Extraordinary Life: The Story of a Monarch Butterfly*, and *Everybody Has a Bellybutton: Your Life Before You Were Born.*

The Process of Writing How-To Books

SOCCER: THE SECOND BOOK

ANDY GUTELLE

I want to talk to you a little bit about the process of writing a book that teaches kids how to play sports. In particular I want to talk about a soccer book that I recently finished. It is a follow-up to a baseball book for kids that I wrote two years ago. As I look at my notes, I see that they are a lot about research, too. I guess maybe that is the nature of nonfiction writing—that eventually you end up talking about your research.

Although this book followed my baseball one, I found myself starting from a different position. When I wrote the baseball book, I had spent my whole life playing and watching baseball, and

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Dear Writer:

Writing for children is a special calling—and a tremendous responsibility. It is a noble task, but it does not come easily.

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I share their belief—and their quest. As a parent, and as an editor at *Highlights* for the past twenty-eight years, I have devoted my life to children and their literature.

If you, too, love children and believe in enriching young minds through literature . . . if you seek a brighter, clearer vision of your writing goals and abilities . . . then I invite you to join us at our Writers Workshop at Chautauqua.

We'll spend a week communing with others who share our dream—writing for children. We'll absorb practical advice, gain inspiration, and exercise creativity with distinguished authors and editors of children's literature. Through one-on-one consultations, small-group discussions, and lectures, we'll share insights.

And the location couldn't be more appropriate . . . the tranquil lakeside community of Chautauqua. For more than one hundred years, it has been the gathering place of thinkers, writers, and inventors.

Over the past fourteen years, scores of children's writers in pursuit of excellence have attended this magical week at Chautauqua. They say that the experience is unforgettable. Some say that it has ged their lives.

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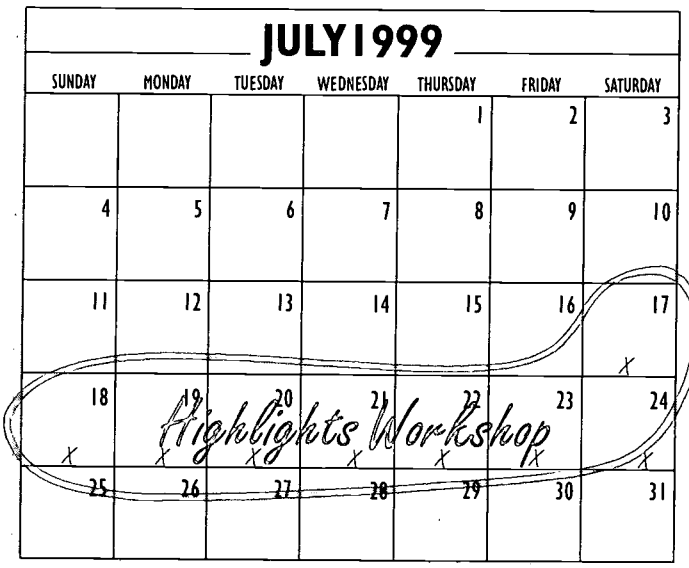

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This July, it will happen again . . . one hundred writers working productively, intensively, passionately. You deserve to share in this memorable experience . . . because our children deserve the best in literature and poetry, fact and fantasy.

If you're a writer who shares our dedication to children and their literature, please consider joining us. Simply fill out and mail the coupon in this insert. It may change your life . . . and the life of that child who will someday sit down and read your words.

Sincerely,

Kent

Kent L. Brown Jr.
Executive Director, *Highlights Foundation*

Workshop Faculty

Meet some of the distinguished faculty who will lead you in the pursuit of fine writing.

TEDD ARNOLD
Tedd Arnold's bright, comical illustrations grace more than twenty-five books, many of which were also written by him. *Green Wilma* was a PBS *Storytime* Featured Title and an IRA/CBC Children's Choice. Other books include *Parts,* and *My Dog Never Says Please.*

GARY BLACKWOOD
Gary's novels include *Wild Timothy,* which *School Library Journal* called a "suspenseful and philosophical survival story," and *The Dying Sun,* voted "Best Young Adult Novel of 1989" by the Friends of American Writers. His newest release is *Shakespeare Stealers.*

PAT BRODERICK
Pat is the vice-president, editorial director and cofounder of *Teaching Pre K-8* (formerly *Early Years*), a respected and award-winning periodical for educators. For the past twelve years, the faculty at Chautauqua has been enhanced by her unlimited store of knowledge.

MARY LOU CARNEY
Mary Lou is the creator and editor of *Guideposts for Kids* and *Guideposts for Teens*, national magazines reaching millions of readers. She is the author of seventeen books, including her best-selling book, *Bubble Gum* and *Chalk Dust: Prayers and Poems for Teachers.*

JOY COWLEY
In 1990, New Zealand awarded Joy its Commemorative Medal for her service to children's literature, and in 1992 she received the Order of the British Empire, which acknowledges her distinguished service to the arts and sciences. She is the author of numerous books, including her most recent, *The Rusty Trusty Tractor.*

BERNICE CULLINAN
Bee is a professor of reading and children's literature at New York University, and since 1990 she has served as editor in chief of the Wordsong poetry imprint at Boyds Mills Press. Bee is the author of the classic textbook *Literature and the Child* as well as many other books, including *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read.*

ANDREA EARLY
Andrea has worked in children's publishing as an author, editor, and publicist, and is currently a consulting [illegible] for *Highlights for Children,* specializing in on-line projects. She is the author of two books and has received the John Burroughs Award for Outstanding Nature Books for Children and two National Science Teachers Awards.

JUDITH ENDERLE
Judy and her writing partner, Stephanie Gordon, have co-authored numerous books for young readers, including the award-winning *Six Sleepy Sheep.* She is also co-editor of the Fox Broadcasting Children's Network magazine *Totally Kids* and a story editor and writer of the Fox children's television program *Rimba's Island.*

MARGERY FACKLAM
Margery is the author of more than thirty-seven books, including *The Big Bug Book*, which *School Library Journal* called "concisely written and well organized" in a starred review. Margery also puts her expertise to work teaching writing at the University of Buffalo, Buffalo State College, and the Institute of Children's Literature.

BRENT FARMER
Brent is the founder and president of Charlesbridge, a publisher of children's books and educational materials. Charlesbridge began publishing nonfiction children's picture books in 1988 and in 1997 introduced the Tailwinds imprint for fiction titles.

CAROLE FIORE
Carole is currently a library program specialist youth services consultant with the State Library of Florida, where she directs the award-winning Florida Library Youth Program. She has taught children's literature at the University of Tampa and has served on numerous committees, including the Newbery Award and Caldecott Award Committees.

PATRICIA LEE GAUCH
Patty is the vice-president and editorial director of Philomel Books as well as a respected author in her own right. She has written more than a dozen books, the most recent of which is *Presenting Tanya, the Ugly Duckling,* and has also taught children's literature on the college level.

JAMES CROSS GIBLIN
As former editor in chief of Clarion Books, a past president of the Children's Book Council, and a member of the board of directors of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Jim is well qualified to be the author of *Writing Books for Young People.* Twelve of his books have been named Notable Children's Books by the American Library Association.

STEPHANIE GORDON
Stephanie has co-authored many books for young people, including the Children's Choice books *Two Badd Babies* and *Six Snowy Sheep.* With her writing partner, Judy Ross Enderle, she works as a free-lance editor critiquing manuscripts for other children's writers.

MONICA GUNNING
Monica is the author of the much-honored *Not a Copper Penny in Me House* and *Under the Breadfruit Tree,* two collections of poems about her colorful childhood in the Caribbean. She was named one of the Outstanding Elementary Teachers in the United States and is listed in Who's Who of American Women.

ANDREW GUTELLE
Andy is an editorial consultant participating in the development of many publishing projects for children. He launched *3-2-1 Contact*, the award-winning children's science magazine. Now called *Contact Kids*, it is in its nineteenth year of publication. Andy received five Emmy nominations for outstanding writing in a children's series for his work with *Reading Rainbow.*

DAYTON O. HYDE
Dayton is the author of *The Major, the Poacher and the Wonderful One-Trout River,* one of the best-loved fishing tales of recent times and winner of the Northwest Booksellers Award for Literary Excellence. Dayton has taught at the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference for more than twenty years and has been a Chautauqua faculty member for the past thirteen years.

PETER JACOBI
Peter is a professor of journalism at Indiana University and a consultant with magazines and corporations. His articles have appeared in *World Book, The New York Times, Highlights for Children,* and others. His two guidebooks—*The Magazine Article: How to Think It, Plan It, Write It* and *Writing with Style: The News Story and the Feature*—are standard reference sources for journalists.

MARTIN KAMINSKY
Marty, a 1990 graduate of Chautauqua himself, has written more than twenty-five articles for magazines, such as *Highlights for Children, Family Fun, Parenting,* and *Disney Adventures.* He is currently writing a book for Boyds Mills Press about athletes who have overcome diversity.

LARRY PRINGLE
Larry is a renowned writer of both fiction and nonfiction with more than eighty books to his credit. Recent titles include *One Room School, Naming the Cat* (which *Kirkus* called "warmly appealing") and *Everybody Has a Bellybutton: Your Life Before You Were Born.*

KIM RICHARDSON
Kim is a founding partner of the UK-based "book packager" Bender Richardson White, which designs and produces children's illustrated nonfiction books for the international market. BRW created the award-winning *Dougal Dixon's Dinosaurs, Don Lessem's Dinosaur Worlds,* and the guidebook component for the Top Secret Adventures series.

DAVID SMALL
David is the well-known author and illustrator of more than twenty picture books for children, including the popular *Imogene's Antlers* and *The Gardener,* which was named a Caldecott Honor Book for 1997. He is also a free-lance artist whose work appears in *The New Yorker, The New York Times,* and the *Washington Post.*

SARAH STEWART
A published poet and a lifelong diarist, Sarah is the author of three acclaimed children's books— *The Money Tree, The Library* and *The Gardener. The Library* is a best seller, popular with both children and adults, and *The Gardener* received numerous awards, including a 1997 Caldecott Honor and a Christopher Award.

SUSAN TEJADA
Susan is editor in chief of *National Geographic World,* the Society's magazine for children. Under her leadership, *National Geographic World* has received numerous awards, including the Folio Editorial Excellence Award for Best Youth Magazine, and the Parents' Choice Foundation Gold Medal.

RITA WILLIAMS-GARCIA
Rita's first story was published in *Highlights for Children* in 1972, and since then she has become known for her realistic portrayal of African American teens in urban settings. Her young adult novels include *Like Sisters on the Homefront,* a Coretta Scott King Honor Book, *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* and *Blue Tights.*

CAROLYN YODER
Carolyn is the executive director of the New Hampshire Antiquarian Society, senior editor of history for *Highlights for Children,* and a writing tutor at New England College. From 1994 to 1996 she was assistant publisher of Cobblestone Publishing, Inc., overseeing the development of its book division.

JANE YOLEN
Called "America's Hans Christian Andersen," Jane is the distinguished author of more than two hundred books for children, young adults, and adults. Jane has earned numerous awards for her writing, including the Regina Medal, the Society of Children's Book Writers Award, and the Christopher Medal, just to name a few. *Owl Moon,* her best-known title, won the 1988 Caldecott Medal.

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reading about it. I loved baseball, felt very confident talking about it and thinking about it. However, soccer was a different story. I knew very little about soccer. So this was one of those cases as a nonfiction writer when I needed to do a lot of research to learn my subject. To do this I combined several types of research. I began by looking at lots of other soccer books—kids' books and adult books. The only books I avoided were ones that were too close or too similar in style to the instructional one I was about to do. I didn't want to be influenced by other writers, so I put those books aside. At a later date, after I was well into my writing and felt confident that I knew where I was going, I did look to see what paths some other writers had taken.

Ann Berger and Andy Gutelle outside the Hall of Christ.

In addition to book research, I went to the library and local video stores, and I took out every video on how to play soccer that I could find. Most of them were terribly written, but they were helpful in a particular way. They showed people kicking soccer balls, making passes, goalkeeping, and so on. I could stop the tape, rewind it, and look at it again and again. This gave me a chance to closely study the specific skills and break them down into steps that I could later describe to my readers.

A third type of research that I did was on-line. I went to Yahoo, typed in "Soccer," hit return, and the next thing I knew I was in Brazil reading about Brazilian football. More and more I find myself going on-line to do bits of research. I am somewhat suspicious about the facts that I find at times, but in this case it was a great opportunity to travel the world and see how soccer-crazy people really are. So I was getting a feeling about the game that was quite different from what I could find in any other way.

There were two final kinds of research I did that were most important. First of all, I did a number of interviews. I interviewed soccer star Cobi Jones, who is listed as co-author of the book. We spoke several times by telephone. I did not meet him in person, but Cobi is someone who is very relaxed and easy to talk to. So even though we did not meet face to face, he provided me with hours of information. I also relied on two other soccer experts. They came over from England about ten years ago and brought their soccer balls and love of the sport with them. They are in charge of all youth soccer near my home in Montclair, New Jersey. They have camps; they also run the town league and coach traveling teams. They were passionate about soccer, and they were eager to help. I also talked to soccer moms and soccer dads. I kept discovering people who were involved with the game, and I asked them what they thought children needed to know about it.

In addition to interviews I did one final bit of research, which in my journalism-school days was called unobtrusive measures. I went out to a local park and spent as much time as I could watching kids play soccer. I watched little kids play and older ones, too. I watched boys and girls play, and noticed they approached the game differently. I made notes about that and about how they dressed and talked. When I was almost done with this last type of research, I began writing.

The book went through four drafts. I gave it to my local soccer experts, and they ripped it apart, so I rewrote it. I gave it to them again, and they ripped it apart again, and I rewrote it. After I turned it in, the book's illustrator, who happened to be a soccer dad, worried that my approach might be too British because of my experts. I didn't think so, but I called my editor, and she agreed to give me a couple more weeks. I had a new expert read the manuscript. He is the assistant coach of the woman's soccer team at Yale University. So I went through minor revisions based on his comments.

At this point I felt pretty confident that I was on the right track. I found that I felt better about the manuscript with each draft. In the end I doubt that I did more work than on my baseball book. But in this case my confidence grew steadily as I worked on the book. By the end I was pretty sure I knew what I was talking about. The book is due out this fall, and I hope it will be as well received as my baseball book

Several years ago I saw a Siskel and Ebert show about movie series like the Pink Panther and James Bond. It was their theory that the second movie in a series is the critical one because it defines whether the basic approach has enough life and strength to it to be done again and again. I feel that way about my soccer book. It has solidified my approach to writing "how-to" sports books. With a little luck, some time in the future I may be writing a basketball book, a football one, and others, too.

ANDREW GUTELLE

Andy's career began after a chance meeting with an old friend led to an associate editor's job on a new children's magazine. Several years later, as editor, he launched *3-2-1 Contact.*

An author with a strong interest in nonfiction subjects, he has written books for several publishers, including Workman Publishing, Random House, Putnam & Grosset, and Time-Life Books. As an editorial consultant he has participated in the development of many publishing projects for children.

In the past ten years Andy has branched out into television video projects and new media.

Difficult Subjects

SUSAN TEJADA

I'd like to talk about how to handle difficult subjects in a way that is appropriate for children. How should you handle subjects such as the environment, history, natural history and biology, and political conflict and war without overwhelming or depressing children?

First, you can't avoid these subjects. The subjects are real, and if they are part of the story you are telling, you have to find a way to handle them in a straightforward manner. You really can't sugarcoat them or pull any punches; you have to be honest. At the same time, you have to have balance. There are

different points of view on issues. You will have your own point of view, but that should not prevent you from acknowledging others as well. When you present various sides to a story, it will also become apparent that what is perceived as a problem by some is not always perceived as a problem by others.

Kent Brown (left) and his brother David auction off items at Thursday night's auction, an event that provides fun for all and funds for scholarships.

One of the most important things you can do is present solutions, or at least present the fact that there's hope for solutions. You don't want to discourage children; these are the people who are going to grow up and work on solving the problems that you're describing, and you want to give them hope that solutions are out there.

The Environment

A difficult subject in covering environmental issues, for example, is air pollution. Children have it within their power to have some impact, if not a huge one, on this problem. They can ride in cars less: bike, carpool, take public transportation. And they should know that adults are working to pass laws to control air pollution. You may take such information for granted, but kids don't know that laws exist or are being developed. When they have such information, they may feel that they have some control over a situation, and that they're not helpless in confronting a large problem.

For children to have an impact on any issue, they must become educated about it. This is something I feel doesn't get enough emphasis, but reading and learning about science and the issues when you're young is obviously something that pays off when you grow up.

Children have, in fact, had a lot of success in accomplishing environmental change. We've done stories about kids who have set aside nature preserves and trails. In fact, a few years ago, it was a kids' campaign that succeeded in getting companies to use dolphin-safe nets for tuna fishing.

Wildlife

You might wonder what could be "difficult" in the area of natural history. Many animal stories we do are about endangered species. Species become endangered due to habitat loss and also because of poaching and other human activity. It's important to clarify that in a lot of countries, people are not setting out deliberately to cause habitat loss and species extinction. They are seeking ways to survive. They are clearing the forest or poaching animals to sell because they are trying to feed their families. I'm not condoning such practices, but cautioning you: if you get up on a soapbox, you may end up with a racist tone you did not intend. So when you write about these issues, be balanced. And remember to mention any research projects and protective laws so that kids realize people are working to save endangered species. You don't want to discourage kids. Reading about research projects may inspire them to become scientists themselves one day.

History

Kids are interested in reading about disasters just as adults are. But you don't want to terrify young readers so much that they're afraid to go out the front door. One way to overcome this is to cover a disaster from the point of view of a survivor, especially a young survivor. We've done this in stories about the Johnstown flood, the Chicago fire, a Colorado blizzard, and the sinking of the *Titanic*. This implicitly conveys the message that, yes, there was a terrible disaster, but all was not lost; there were survivors. Furthermore, technological advances and new laws make it highly unlikely that similar disasters will ever happen in the future.

Early explorers—Lewis and Clark, Stanley and Livingstone, Christopher Columbus, and so many more—have in the past been presented as heroes. When you do the research, you understand more and more how they treated the indigenous peoples in whatever country they were exploring, and now you have a bigger picture. How do you handle this for kids? It's difficult. My best advice is, again, be balanced. You have to cover various sides of the story without distorting the truth.

It's particularly difficult to cover political conflict and war in a child-appropriate way. We don't do this very often. We did do a story on Northern Ireland a few years ago; we told the story of the conflict there from the point of view of Catholic and Protestant children working together in a circus group. The purpose of the group was not only to teach the kids circus routines but also to get both sides to work together, hopefully, for a better future. A circus certainly can't solve all problems, but it's a step in the right direction, and it's important to give kids hope for solutions.

To sum up: Don't gloss over the truth, tell it like it is . . . but present options for change, because your readers are the ones who can change the future.

SUSAN TEJADA

Susan is editor in chief of *National Geographic World*, the Society's magazine for children. She was responsible for overseeing the magazine's 1997 relaunch, introducing many new departments and series, including a series of historical adventure stories and a biography series.

Publishing Nonfiction

BRENT FARMER

I'm going to talk about the way things are in children's nonfiction, and what the present-day publisher might be looking for in nonfiction picture books. It's useful in looking at the way things are to first draw a distinction between the way things *were* in the nonfiction market. Not so long ago, there was a very pronounced difference in the markets for

fiction and nonfiction. Picture books sold through retail outlets—mostly bookstores—were almost exclusively fiction. Informational, or nonfiction, books on the other hand were sold through the institutional market—to school and public libraries.

The reader in the institutional market is pretty much a *captive* audience, and the historic role of the institutional nonfiction book has been to serve as a general purpose or curriculum-related reference. The historic editorial emphasis for this readership has been on informational content, with relatively less emphasis on the visual aspect of the book or on the expressive aspects of the text.

The trade market, as we know, is anything but a captive audience. The fiction picture books that do well in the trade do so because of their compelling concept, compelling written expression, compelling visual presentation, or a combination of the three. These are books that children want to read for pleasure, even if they don't have to.

Beginning in the late 1970s there has been a very gradual emergence of nonfiction picture books designed for the trade market. In the 1990s we have seen a rapid growth in the number of trade nonfiction titles.

The nonfiction picture book that we are seeing today, and looking for tomorrow, has changed markedly from the primarily institutional nonfiction of yesteryear. If in the past the emphasis was on content, in the present we must place equal emphasis on context. Like fiction, the current nonfiction picture book needs to present content, but in a context that will engage the *non-captive* reader on the very first page or pages. The book needs to inspire the reader—to explore further, to experience a sense of wonder, or simply to read the book over and over.

How do we as nonfiction writers, illustrators, and publishers accomplish this? I think that the answer is, and has been, that we borrow from the techniques of successful fiction. The artful use of language and storytelling techniques, in words and in pictures, is as appropriate for successful nonfiction as it is for successful fiction.

One final thought. Our collective challenge, while we are pushing the boundaries of nonfiction picture books, is to respect the underlying importance to the nonfiction genre of informational content and to assure that this content is not overwhelmed by the new emphasis u text.

BRENT FARMER

Brent is the president of Charlesbridge, a publisher of children's books and educational materials. He founded Charlesbridge in 1980. Currently he serves as director of Wisdom Publications, a nonprofit publisher of authentic Buddhist works.

Bespoke Writing

LIONEL BENDER

Authors of illustrated nonfiction books for the international market are invariably given a "house-style" guide and told how many words they must write on each page. They must accept that design comes first and words second. Some authors regard this as stifling, restrictive, and the wrong way to produce books. But it takes great skill and knowledge of one's subject. Bespoke writing can be a lucrative, full-time profession and one that is in great demand.

There is a constant demand for children's nonfiction and, if an author can get in on the writing circle, it can be as satisfying as writing fiction. It is certainly a way of getting one's work into print on a regular basis.

1. What exactly do I mean by bespoke, or "made to measure," writing?

   In bespoke writing the author is told exactly how many lines of so many characters per line to write to fit a fixed page layout.

2. What part of the market needs bespoke writing?

   Illustrated nonfiction books for the international co-edition market. This is because such books are produced in a way that words must be written to measure around illustrations.

3. What part do I play in all this?

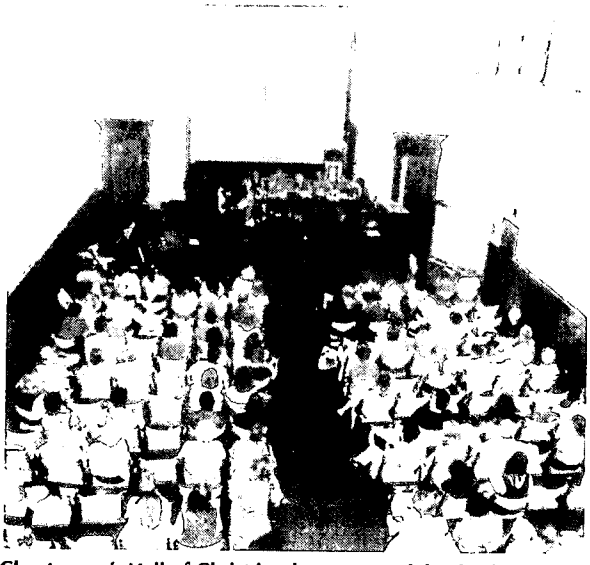
   Bender Richardson and White (BRW) is an editorial, design, and production team producing illustrated nonfiction books for the international co-edition market. I am the editorial partner. I have a design partner and a production/sales/contract partner. Over the past ten years, we have produced more than three hundred books in fifty series for thirty different publishers in the UK and the USA. For Highlights we have produced two dinosaur products, a series of twenty Top Secret titles, and have in production various other titles.

4. Why is bespoke writing necessary?

   To produce books for the international co-edition market, one has to come up with an internationally acceptable design, a style of illustration, and a mode of production that make changing the text films simple and accurate. Normally books are produced with integrated text and illustrations. For international editions, one has to produce text as a fifth film—an additional and separate black film—so that illustration film can be left untouched. This is the secret, and authors must work to facilitate this scheme.

5. From an author's point of view, what is so special?

   It means that to some extent the author must follow strict guidelines and accept that the design rules. However, the author still has many opportunities to be creative, but as part of a team. The team comprises editor, designer, picture researcher, illustrator, and art editor. This is quite different from writing fiction, where the author's style and originality are encouraged; where exact length is not a problem; perhaps where there are no illustrations; perhaps where time is not of the essence; and where problems of fit rarely exist.



Chautauqua's Hall of Christ is where many of the daytime workshop activities take place.

6. How do BRW and other companies produce such books?

   Design comes first, mainly because we are selling our ideas to marketing people and not to the book-buying public and editors. Marketing people

are more concerned with the following than with whether the authors are well known, whether they are experts in their field. We're concerned with

Subject: Is it popular?
Age range: Is it right for them?
Design: Does it look as if it could have been produced in their country?
Market: Is it for schools and libraries or trade?
Format and extent: Is it too big or small; will it fit on the bookshelves?
Price: Is it too expensive to buy, and will they sell it cheaply or as an expensive book?

7. What do we do to sell an idea?
The editor writes a sales sheet and brief synopsis, and the designer does some basic sketches—might show these to some publishers we know well for initial feedback. Either speculatively, for a publisher, or for a fee, we produce a proper presentation with live text, live artwork, and live designs. We produce an accurate costing. At this stage, we will probably contact authors to find a suitable person, and get the author to write a full synopsis and some sample text.
8. Once the project is sold, what does the author have to do?
The author produces a detailed synopsis, including a picture list, artwork list, and summary of what goes into each spread or chapter. Bender Richardson and White then designs the layouts and gets in the photographs from photo agencies. With the author, we then refine the layouts and select the photographs and artwork ideas. These are shown to the publisher for their approval. The editor then briefs the author. The author is given layouts, photographs, and artwork roughs— the layouts leave holes for the author to fill. This is made-to-measure writing. We give the author exact line lengths and numbers of lines to work to, a house-style guide, and tips about how to minimize changes for a UK text, for example, miles to kilometers., inches to centimeters.
9. How is the book "package" put together?
Photographs are scanned and put into page in Quark Express or PageMaker. The artwork is commissioned. Covers are designed and made up. Text is edited, then put into place on the pages. The editor cuts and fits the text. The pages are then checked by the author.
10. What skills does an author need?
He or she must know the subject well enough to know what can be left out and what must go in. The author must also have good visual sense; the ability to manipulate information between main text, captions and labels; the skill of writing-to-fit; and the ability to best use consultants. He or she must meet deadlines, be part of a team (not necessarily the driving force), work with text on disc or via E-mail; take or reject (for good reasons) comments of publishers, editors, and consultants; and write fluently, attractively, and "to fit."
11. Why is it important to have a good author?
A good nonfiction book is one that has good design and illustration but also good text that can stand the test of time. Eventually, librarians, teachers and parents will get to assess and judge the text. If it is not up to standard, the book will have a short lifespan. So it is not totally a matter of design—but words and pictures must be carefully integrated.

LIONEL BENDER

Lionel Bender is a founding partner of the U.K.-based editorial-design-production team Bender Richardson and White, which produces children's illustrated nonfiction books for the international co-edition market. He has written more than forty books, mostly on the subjects of science and natural history, and has edited and coproduced another two hundred books.

History: Think locally, write nationally

CAROLYN P. YODER

For many years I visited schools and asked students what they thought about history or social studies. The answers unfortunately were not many or optimistic—"I don't want anything to do with it." "It's my least favorite subject." "It's almost as bad as science, but not quite." Those comments were really discouraging for a history editor, but in time I decided to take another approach and explain what history really means.

History is not the listing of facts or broad overviews—history is the stories of themselves, the stories of their families, the stories of their towns, the businesses, and so on.

When history became personal, the kids were turned on and tuned in. I think that's really true for anybody who's writing history today.

I just finished writing a piece for *Children's Writer* where I interviewed many history writers. Some of the people I interviewed disliked history—or social studies—as kids. It wasn't until later in life, when history became more immediate—personal—that they got excited.

These writers also feel the need to "fix" history—to make it come alive for young readers—and also to be accurate and fair.

This is an exciting and challenging time for history writers.

If any of you are budding history writers, look to your own lives and see if there's anything there that speaks to you. One of the best ways to start out writing history—to hone your skills and to know what it really takes to write a history piece—is to do something in your own backyard—in your hometown or inside your soul because you can do a really good job.

You might be surprised to find the history that exists in your own family or your own town. A great place to begin your writing adventure is to visit your local historical society and see what's there. Most of them are filled with amazing stories—letters and diaries, manuscripts, photographs, and pieces of art. And usually at local historical societies there are experts who can help you locate ancestors, family members, friends, primary sources, and important documents.

The local library, state library, or state historical society might also have information you need. There are organizations in your town such as the Chamber of Commerce, town clerk's office, and so on. A lot of towns hold festivals based on local historical events. When Elizabeth Yates wrote *Amos Fortune, Freeman* (which won the Newbery in 1951), she spent a great deal of time at the town clerk's office researching Amos.

Sometimes it pays to stay away from the obvious Jefferson, Washington, Lincoln, and look inward or locally. It's amazing what you can find!

CAROLYN P. YODER

Carolyn is the executive director of the New Hampshire Antiquarian Society and a writing tutor at New England College. She is also senior editor of history for *Highlights for Children.*

How to Write a Children's Book

FREDRICK AND PATRICIA MCKISSACK

What in the world do we mean when we say "writing a children's book." There are some stages and steps that you would use no matter what age group you're writing for. It makes no difference if you're writing an easy-to-read, a picture book, a collection, a first novel, a juvenile novel, or even a nonfiction biography or nonfiction historical piece. And we'd like to start with that.

Fredrick (left) and Patricia McKissack (far right) with Brenda Fillingham at the lamb roast.

First, the communication cycle is set up. You have a sender and a receiver. You're on the sending end of the communication cycle. And your receiver is your young audience—your young reader. You need to target who your receiver is going to be. Now, not the person who's going to buy the book, because with children's books adults buy the books. Children do not buy their books. They get to select them in the library. The grandmother buys the book and sends it to them. The mother buys the book and shares it with them. The publisher is concerned about attracting the buyer, but as the writer you must remember that you are writing for a young reader and you must have that receiver or that listener in mind. You must know him or her very well. Now, how do you get to know your readers? Observation. If you're going to write for children, then you should find yourself in places where c[illegible]are. Go to your school. You k[illegible]'d be surprised at how open schools are to people coming in to read to them, to share stories with children. Librarians always welcome adults who want to come in and volunteer time. It's an excellent way to get to know kids. But you say, I'm about writing. I want to write the words. I want to get to the writing of the book. But this is part of the writing. This is getting ready to write. And most of us are not ready to write. You need to get yourself familiar with your receiver. Because what will happen in the communication cycle is that there's the message. The sender has a message, and the message is sent to a receiver, and it is completed when that reader reads what you have written and understands it. Now if something breaks down in the middle, meaning that the vocabulary is too difficult for them (if it's an easy-to-read and they're midway through and they put it down because they say it's too hard), what you have then is static. And static is what breaks down. And when static breaks down the message, then your communication cycle has been broken, and the reading of the book has not been a successful experience for them, for the receivers. You don't want that to happen. So you observe, watch, and see what they are interested in and at what age level they can handle certain vocabulary. Now, we don't believe in controlled vocabulary. We don't believe in writing with formulas. We don't like any of that. But when you say you're writing an easy-to-read or a picture book, you must remember that you're dealing with very young children. You need to listen to them and learn how they talk, how they observe the world, and how they explain the world around them. Listening to children is very important. Being with them is very important. The first step in beginning to write any book for children is to get to know your receiver.

Parts of a story are: characters, setting, action, and idea. Basically those are the four. Now, there are people who will add other elements to this, but those are the four basic elements that are part of a story.

Characters

If your characters are interesting enough, your book will sell. Your characters are people that you create. Now, one of the most difficult things for most writers is to get the voice of the character. Characters in books sometime leave the pages and become part of our lives; they become real, living, breathing characters who are created. You must create characters. Not for fifty years from now, but for today's child, and if it's written for today's child, it will transcend time. Good characters will last forever.

Setting

There are some stories where characters are secondary to the setting. Can you think of a book that you've read where the setting put you in the time and the place so well? When I started *Miranda and Brother Wind* it was spring, and the stereo was clanging up the side

PATRICIA AND FREDRICK MCKISSACK

Pat and her husband, Fred, are a prolific writing and research team. Their creative partnership has produced more than ninety nonfiction books. "We try to enlighten, to change attitudes—to build bridges with books."

Their best-selling title, *History of the Civil Rights Movement in America from 1865-Present*, is used widely in junior-high and middle schools around the country. In 1993, their biography of Sojourner Truth, *Ain't I a Woman?*, was named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book and an ALA Notable Children's Book, and received the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award. New books published in 1997 include an autobiographical picture book entitled *Can You Imagine?*

of the walk, and the snowballs were blooming, and the birds were back chirping in the trees. I must have gone on for two paragraphs talking about what spring looked like in Ridgetop, Tennessee. And then right at the peak of this beauty, in steps Brother Wind. When my editor, Ann, wrote back she had a little circle around that paragraph and a little *q* that means delete. I said, "You can't do that, that's my setting." She said, "But your illustrator will take care of that." "But how will he know what it looks like?" She said, "You know what it looks like, he will know what it looks like." "But I can't trust him. Suppose it's not there?" "Well," she said, "Jerry is my illustrator. He will know, just trust me on this, OK?" That is a very important word, trust. You must trust your editor. All that I had described, Jerry drew. He never read my manuscript with all of that description in it. But he studied Ridgetop, Tennessee. He knew what was blooming at what time, in the spring. He put in all the things that I had described. In this case, Jerry said, within thirty days he had visualized the whole book except Brother Wind. And he could not visualize it, and could not visualize it, and the book was getting later, and later, and later. And he was getting phone calls. And so finally he gets the phone call, and he tells the art director he just can't visualize it. He gets off the phone and looks in the mirror, and he says, "You will do." And the thing is the visualization, looking in the mirror, this is Brother Wind, it just came into his head. And that made the Caldecott book.

I found my very soul at Chautauqua. I saw myself and found truths I have hidden in those secret places we all carry. A wise instructor touched, broke, and mended my heart all in an hour by his simple message: writing is an experiment in telling the truth. He showed his soul for a fleeting moment.

—Carlene Smart, Lee, ME

Action

The action means what your characters do. This is what really drives the story. In some stories where the action lasts much longer, you forget who the characters are and what they do that is so important. Can you think of that story that you remember? You can't remember the characters, the title of the book, the author; and you can't remember necessarily where it took place—but you sure remember what went on.

How many of you have ever read *The Encyclopedia Brown Theory*? The cast is very strong in that story, and the setting is there, of course, and the way he solves the problems. How he goes about doing that is always very interesting to me. *Squash buckle*—I remember scenes where I can see the dueling and the fencing and the action going on on top of this ship and I can see them jumping from ship to ship, even sword fighting.

The idea

Remember all the stories where the idea lasts and you've forgotten the action, setting, characters? The idea holds it all together. It is the strong element of the story. Biographies are stories of character, not stories, but books of character—but you have to create the character. Your fiction ought to read like nonfiction and your nonfiction ought to read like fiction. They told me that one time, and I thought it was very clever. And there's a little bit of truth in it, that your fictional characters have to sound like they're real and your real characters have to sound like "Ah, man, you made that up, didn't you? Did they really do that?" Idea. Stories of idea. Can you think of any? *The Giver*—I can't remember his name, I don't remember the town, I don't remember the setting. I mean it's there, and I know they were all there, and they were all very strong. But the idea of that story; it's chilling. And I love the ending because it makes people talk. Did he make it or didn't he? Did they make it or didn't they? Some people say they did. Some people say no, they didn't. Is the glass half full or half empty? I could not imagine those kids not making it. They went straight on in. They made it. But then, I've heard other people say no, they didn't make it.

I think that's a part of the strength of it, keeping it open-ended, so the children go on with that idea.

Monday evening at the Country Club, awaiting the wonderful words of Fredrick and Patricia McKissack.

Where Do Ideas Come From?

MARY LOU CARNEY

Creativity is both a fragile and a viable thing. It is the ability to see things in a new way and from that to produce something that didn't exist before. Something original. Psychologists insist that genius is little more than perceiving in unhabitual ways. Those of us who are creative live life more joyfully and more painfully. When you're creative, you tend to live life with a heightened consciousness. Creativity is a muscle, and the more you flex it, the bigger it gets. The more you flex it, the bigger *you* get.

Now, just as a coin has two sides, so the thinking you do has two sides. One of these is sequential and the other is random. And both kinds of thinking are important in your writing. Your sequential ability permits you to grasp and organize data. It lets you arrange your files in alphabetical order. It lets you keep accurate records of where you send your manuscripts. Creatively your sequential side lets you refine and duplicate other people's ideas. Curriculum writing is very much a sequential kind of writing. Your sequential side prompts conventionality, not risk taking.

Mary Lou Carney (left) and conferee Carole Silva put their heads together.

Many of us live our lives thinking like this. But if you're going to succeed as a writer, you can't think that way all of the time. As a writer you must learn to cultivate your random thinking. It's the kind of thinking that prompts you to be intuitive, impulsive, and sometimes terribly unconventional. Your random abilities enable you to experience the world of emotion, imagination, and even spirituality. They let you sympathize, empathize, and tune in to the thoughts and behavior of others. Random thinking encourages you to live in the concrete world, but not to anchor to it. Instead, you're driven by a sort of divine discontent. That keeps you searching for answers, searching for meaning. Creatively, this kind of thinking lets you come up with ideas that are unique and original.

John Farrell leads a group in folk singing at Wednesday night's barbecue.

When I do presentations for kids, I always tell them that if they want to be writers, they do not have to sign on with Captain Picard and go where no man has gone before. They simply have to go where every man has gone before, but see things in new and unusual ways. When you let your random thinking take over, you begin to see ordinary things in new ways.

I'm going to share with you three things you can do to increase your

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Friends and colleagues who had been to the Workshop in previous years had told me to anticipate lots of work and lots of fun. They were right, of course, but words can't encompass the sense of community and commitment we all felt.

—Judy O'Malley, editor of *Book Links, Connecting Books, and Classrooms*, Chicago, IL

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creativity and perhaps the frequency and amount of your royalty checks. **The first thing: Learn to synthesize, to make associations between unlike things, between the concrete and the abstract.** I have written poems where unmated socks became symbols of hope, and I have written devotionals where the Kentucky hillside represented God's unending love.

The second thing: Learn to accept and even solicit new challenges.

There are only two kinds of things you can write about: things you know about, and things you don't—one just takes a little more research!

Every kind of writing benefits every kind of writing. Imprint that in your mind! So stretch yourself to new projects. Take risks. You'll be surprised at what you can do that you don't even know you can do!

Third thing: Be willing to be creatively sidetracked.

Follow your instincts, and try your hand at spur-of-the-moment opportunities or fresh, unexpected ideas. While researching a book on spiritual discipline, I "sidetracked" long enough to write a very successful joke book for children.

So stretch yourself, try new things. You may find that you're talented at a kind of writing that you've never even thought about doing. You may find that there are topics for writing that you've been stepping over for five years. Let yourself think in ways you've never thought. Take a walk and wonder about all the things you've come to take for granted. Why are violets purple? What makes dew? Why is tree bark rough? Why do crawdads crawl? Admit anew that you don't know it all; in fact, you know hardly any of it. So find out, and then use your new knowledge in fresh, creative, rewarding ways.

Synthesize, stretch, sidetrack. Exercise your right to be creative and be published!

MARY LOU CARNEY

Mary Lou Carney created and became editor of *Guideposts for Kids* in 1990 after many years as a free-lance writer.

Bubble Gum and Chalk Dust: Prayers and Poems for Teachers, her best-selling book, is now in its fourteenth printing. Mary Lou has written five books in Zondervan's "Herbie" series as well as an advice book for kids, *Dear Wally, I've Got This Problem*. The character she created, Wally the Turtle, now stars in *Guideposts Junction*, a six-video series based on the "Dear Wally" column that Mary Lou writes in *Guideposts for Kids*.

Maria Salvadore (left), Helen Gotkowitz (middle), and Jewell Stoddard enjoying themselves at Monday night's dinner at the Chautauqua Country Club.

What Makes a Great Book?

MARIA SALVADORE

What is a great book? Why does one book continue to be read generation after generation? Is it possible to identify elements that these books might have in common?

A truly great book is one that presents a broad, abstract truth in the unique style of a particular writer. Jean Karl contends that "The first is a universal truth, the second a personal truth. It takes an author who can mingle both to make a great, creative piece of literature."

An author's style, characterization, narrative construct, setting, theme, et al. are the tools used—in art and in text, in the literature of fact and of fiction—to achieve a universal experience through "personal truth." Readers of all ages respond, although it is incumbent on the adult to be aware of the specifics and to help determine the potential audience. It is, after all, adults who write, illustrate, publish, and purchase children's books. They work diligently with and for children's books because adults appreciate that "children will always need stories to expand their spirits and information to expand their grasp."

MARIA SALVADORE

Maria has been coordinator of Children's Services for the District of Columbia Public Library system since 1981. She is responsible for developing the juvenile materials collection, and has initiated and implemented in-service training as well as city-wide programs for children and their families.

Since 1982, Maria has been an adjunct instructor in the University of Maryland's College of Library and Information Science.

Believing in Yourself

DAYTON O. HYDE

Years ago I ran away from home in northern Michigan and eventually ended up in a prep school in Santa Barbara, California, where I had a scholarship. I was afraid of any subject there was except English.

I lived in terrible dread of being kicked out of this prep school. It had one of the highest scholastic standards on the West Coast. Everybody knew more than I did. Because of my dialect, kids laughed at me. One day the headmaster called me, and I thought, "This is it. He's going to tell me I have to go home. What will I tell my folks?"

Dayton Hyde (left) and Jack Myers, the senior science editor at Highlights, are all smiles!

Instead he said, "I've got a visitor I want you to meet." He invited me over to tea on a beautiful mesa overlooking the Santa Barbara Channel. There was a very small couple there. The man was courtly and balding. I thought he was one of the oldest men I'd ever seen, and he was probably fifty then. I sat there like a little mouse while these grown-ups, the headmaster and his guests, had conversations about all sorts of wonderful things.

All of a sudden, out at the edge of the chaparral brush, a little brown bird started to sing. The woman said, "What bird is that?" Since birds and wildlife had been my only companions, I started telling her about this bird, how it fit into the environment. All of a sudden I realized people were listening to me. I quaked in terror, and I started to stop. This hand came on my shoulder, and I looked around, and the man was crying. He said, "No. No. Go on. That's beautiful." That was Alfred Noyes, the poet. We became very great friends. He would come and get me out of school, take me up in the hills, and he would sit and read "The Highwayman."

The fact that somebody thought that I had a talent somewhere in my body was enough to send me into writing and give me confidence. I think that is what happens here. You've come here and have shown us your stuff, and you've got a lot of people who have confidence in you. A few of you, for the first time. Some of your instructors have told you that you can be writers. That will carry a lot of weight for the rest of your life.

DAYTON O. HYDE

Dayton's classic nature tale, *Don Coyote: The Good and Bad Times of a Maligned American Original*, was a *Reader's Digest* Book of the Month selection and was named by the American Library Association as one of the best books of the 1980s. *The Major, the Poacher, and the Wonderful One-Trout River* was the recipient of the Pacific Northwest Book Sellers Award for Literary Excellence. *Strange Companion* won the Dutton Literary Award and was made into a Disney movie. His photographs have been published in *Time, Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and other publications. His most recent book is *The Bells of Lake Superior.*

The quiet Chautauqua streets were filled with bikers and walkers, the "greats" of children's literature today gathered in the Hall of Christ to fill our minds with enabling concept and encouragement. This was all part of the magic waiting for me.

—Julie Nicholas, Cincinnati, OH

A Rebus Primer

MARILETA ROBINSON

A *Highlights* rebus story should be

Really short. We prefer stories of no more than 125 words. Most magazines want that length or even shorter.

Entertaining. Humor, a mystery or a bit of suspense, a surprise, a punchline, or a twist at the end help. Keep in mind that you're writing for young children but want to appeal to older children, too.

Beginning-reader-friendly. It shouldn't sound like a basal reader, but the language should be simple and easy to follow yet at the same time natural sounding. A repetitive story structure often works nicely. The idea should be simple but imaginative. The topics should be familiar to prereaders—children three to four years old. There should be several common concrete nouns (or numbers or colors)—at least eight different ones—that can be easily illustrated, and at least some of them should be repeated two or three times. Abstract nouns like happiness or fear, adjectives like hard or wet, and verbs don't illustrate well.

Unusual. A fresh slant is essential, as in all writing.

Satisfying. People have trouble with the endings of rebuses. Also, the child in the story should be successful.

MARILETA ROBINSON

Many people say they have the best job at *Highlights*, but Senior Editor Marileta Robinson believes hers is the most fun. She handles the fiction for each issue and works with illustrator Judith Hunt to produce "The Timbertoes."

Marileta was a free-lance writer when she made her first sale to *Highlights* in 1976. She joined *Highlights* in 1988 as an assistant editor.

Creating Memorable Fiction

LINDA OATMAN HIGH

Memorable fiction is created when we as writers enter into the story, and as a result, the reader is drawn in, too. "Show, don't tell" is common advice for fiction writers, and I've come up with some tips:.

Number one. Start with a bang. Make something happen. Present immediately someone interesting doing something interesting. And for kids it's sometimes good to use dialogue in your opening. Jerry Spinelli does this quite often. I say start with a bang, but my writing isn't really action-oriented or adventure-oriented or event-oriented, it's more internal, emotional.

I think if you just start with an interesting situation, that is good. You don't have to start with some big event or some exciting action scene or something gross, or whatever. These things do catch kids' attention, but they have to go with your story. You can't just incorporate a big bang into a story that's otherwise an emotional story.

Number two. Use a fraction of what you know. Pick and choose from your research. Remember that your readers want to be entertained. We have this impulse sometimes when we do a lot of research (we don't want to waste it), so we try to put all our research in our writing, and it gets too heavy. For example when I wrote *A Christmas Star*, I did a lot of research on Christmas in the Depression days. But I couldn't put everything in the book, or it would have seemed contrived. Basically the only things that show up in the book are things like how happy kids were to get maybe an orange, some candy, and a new pair of mittens for Christmas. Sometimes we can do a lot of research and only a little bit of that may show up in our writing, and that's good. Otherwise we are overburdening our readers with information that they really don't want.

Neil Waldman and Linda Oatman High look like living proof of "show, don't tell."

Number three. Create tension and conflict. Put your character at the edge of a cliff and throw rocks at him. That's a good way to think of it. An editor told me when I first started writing that I was ready to write emotion-driven stuff with good characters and good writing but I didn't have a lot of conflict or tension in this story. She told me to think in threes. Throughout the book try to think of three major crises that can happen. The third one is the worst. That's the blackness for your character, when things can't get any worse. And then there's got to be resolution. So if you put your characters somewhere horrible and you throw something awful at them, you're creating tension. Sometimes you can use contrast to create tension. Maybe combine two characters or elements who are very different, bound to pull in opposite directions. Some people create what they call a crucible in which you have opposing characters.

Number four. Create a sense of immediacy. Make the reader feel the events. Focus on people and their feelings in order to make the reader feel as if she is there. Feelings are very important in creating memorable fiction. When I'm writing in the first person, I feel that I've created more of a sense of immediacy within myself. So that's just something that I do to feel as if I'm there, as if I'm in the story. So far, all my books are in first person, but I do have some coming out that are not in first person. I think you need to stretch yourself. If you are writing just in first person, try some other points of view.

Number five. Create word pictures. Use similes and metaphors. Use imagery to write visually. See the story as you write it. What helped me when I first started writing was envisioning my writing as a movie. I would think, as I wrote a chapter, of a scene in a movie because we've all watched lots of movies. Picture where the characters live, picture what they look like, picture their past.

Number six. Use dialogue to set the pace. Good dialogue carries dramatic impact, advances the story, and develops character. I think when you're writing dialogue, it's something that's sort of a knack that grows better as you practice. Writing dialogue isn't writing down something that you hear people say in real life. If you wrote the way things really sound, it would bore readers to death because it goes on and on and on. So when you write dialogue, try to pick out the heart of what people are saying, and convey something with little words. You don't want to have pages and pages of dialogue, the way kids and teenagers really talk.

Number seven. Use melodrama very carefully. Exaggeration, overdramatization, and sensationalism sometimes have a place in the story. So use it very carefully. When you do use it, that should be your blackness, your climax, sometimes your ending. But don't overuse.

Number eight. Use anecdotes to paint a word picture. Weave your anecdote into the prose, a story within a story.

Number nine. Use incidents to create movement. Have things happen in

the story. Use action, keep it moving. Shift scenes, shift focus. You don't want to write a whole book that takes place in the classroom at school. You want to have several different scenes. Maybe a scene in homeroom, a scene outside. Just remember to keep things moving. This is something I have to work at—the action part. A lot of my stuff is emotion-driven, so I can kind of stay in one place. But kids don't like to stay in one place. They need to keep moving. They need some action.

I acquired at Chautauqua specific tools and tips I can use to leap over story hurdles that I've previously had trouble jumping. Now I know how to begin working through these story tangles. I've also realized the importance of getting feedback to developing as a writer.

—Sally Ann Sims, West Chester, PA

Number ten. Fictionalize your nonfiction. Use fiction techniques such as dialogue to spice up nonfiction. Sprinkle facts among the drama to entertain while educating. I did this in my book *Beekeepers*. I wanted to convey a lot of beekeeping information, but I didn't want to do it in a dry, boring kind of way. So I incorporated that information within a story of a grandfather and a granddaughter tending to their honeybees. Rather than just saying here's how you do beekeeping, here are the hives, here's how they're stacked; you need to incorporate some story. And I think we've been hearing that a lot this week from some of the nonfiction writers. You have to use some fiction techniques in your nonfiction writing as well.

Number eleven. Develop interesting characters. Give your character a whole life from the start. He has a past, connections to other people. Characters don't begin when you begin writing. They're people who have a past. You have to sit down and outline this before you start to write. My characters kind of grow in my mind. But I think that if you need to, you should use a worksheet. It helps you remember that your character has a past, that it's a real person, a three-dimensional person. Otherwise you have a cardboard character with no life. We certainly don't want to see that.

Number twelve. Be specific. Use details. This is something we hear a lot in fiction advice. If you're talking about someone getting in a car, don't just talk about the car, talk about what the car looks like. I did that in *Stone's Throw from Paradise*, when I described the last day of Momma's life with the shiny red car and the autumn day. Use colors. Kids love when you use colors. Don't overuse them, but do try to remember to use some colors. Kids need visuals.

Number thirteen. Think "what if"? when you're beginning to write the story. What if this happens? What if that happens?

Number fourteen. Appeal to the senses. Use seeing, hearing, touch, taste, smell. Remember to include these sensory details. It's a little easier if you try to put yourself into the story so deeply that you can feel it, that you can smell it, that you are there. You are having all of these things attack your senses.

And my last tip for show, don't tell: Make your closing solid and satisfying. Tie up any loose ends. Answer questions. Leave the reader with hope and emotions as well as a heart that has been touched and maybe changed. And another tip for endings (I got this five years ago when I was here and Pam Conrad gave a fiction workshop): She said she likes to come full circle. Sometimes if you start a book and then finish it at the same place, coming full circle, the child reader finds that very satisfying.

You want to create fiction so memorable that kids will remember and it will stay in their hearts. I know as a kid if I read something that was really great, really good fiction, it stayed with me, and at times I find myself thinking about some of the book, maybe just one sentence, maybe a line of dialogue, maybe a scene that was in my brain and is still there.

Marileta Robinson explains the process of editing a story for publication.

LINDA OATMAN HIGH

Linda Oatman High grew up in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the setting of *Maizie*, her first novel for children. Holiday House published her first three novels, including *Hound Heaven* and *The Summer of the Great Divide*.

A journalist for more than ten years, Linda has published feature articles in local newspapers. Linda also has had stories published in many magazines, including *Hopscotch, Children's Digest, First,* and *Country Views*.

Conflict

KRISTI HOLL

You're often told that you need to include conflict in every single scene to keep a reader turning the pages — but how do we do it?

Techniques for doing just that are our focus here. They're simple ideas, ones I always use myself, and they can take an "okay story" and transform it into a page turner.

First, after you've thought of your basic story conflict, create a crucible. This is a device that forces the characters to stay together as things heat up. There are two ways to make a crucible work: 1) the character's internal "fight or flight" response is stuck on fight because something at stake is too important to give up; or 2) the characters are stuck in an external crucible and can't get away (for example, on a deserted island or a boat, in a locked room, a small child in a family, or enemies on the same school team). A "crucible" will increase conflict throughout your story, not just in the scene where it's introduced, so try hard to come up with some kind of crucible for your stories and books.

The faculty at Chautauqua was an excellent source of knowledge and inspiration. They made all of us feel that our work was important. They allowed words to come alive and characters to be born within us. Most importantly, they gave us the key to find our own voice and the courage to keep it alive.

—Deborah Lamson, Saylorsburg, PA

Second, there must be something important at stake. Mysteries often fall short here. For example, my students often write intricate plots where a child on vacation solves a mystery. However, even if he isn't successful, nothing will happen to him or anyone he knows personally; he'll just go home at the end of the vacation. Consequently, we don't give a rip whether the hero solves the mystery or not. So make sure the hero has something important at stake. Will thwarting your hero lead to deep unhappiness, misery, or death? It should.

Kristi Holl (left) is getting her point across to Vicki Wittenstein.

Third, keep the conflict alive and growing. To inject tension and suspense into a ho-hum scene, do not behave like a compassionate human being. If you have any nasty tendencies at all, this is the place to use them! Avoid rescuing the hero as long as possible. Keep things anxious and uncertain. My students tend to get the hero out of trouble too soon. Don't let your characters overcome dangers without facing even bigger ones. If a character is frightened or anxious about an upcoming event, hold off that event as long as possible. Then make the situation even worse than the main character anticipated. Also, make sure the actions your characters take to solve the crisis backfire. Prolong it.

Fourth, assume conflict and opposition in every scene. In every scene's dialogue, give your characters different beliefs and tastes, opinions that are poles apart. Before you write the dialogue, get a clear mental picture of what each character's different viewpoint is. In plotting, decide what the logical next event would be in each scene, then do the opposite. Characters hate surprises that upset their plans and expectations (much like most of us do in real life!).

Fifth, use common experiences and settings to deepen the conflict and suspense. Common experiences—dealing with bullies or being scared of the dark—allow the reader to identify with your characters. Conflict is much more intense if the reader realizes "this could happen to me!" (Don't you feel that way after a scary or sad movie? You get more involved in a story that uses experiences the average person can identify with.) A common setting also increases conflict: the more familiar the setting, the more horrible the story can become. Use your main character's home and bedroom, malls, fast-food places, and school. The reader realizes "this could happen where I live!"

Using these techniques, you'll be able to build the conflict from scene to scene, right up to a terrific climax that will leave your reader wanting more.

KRISTI HOLL

Kristi has more than twenty novels for middle-graders as well as more than forty short stories and magazine articles to her credit. Her first book, *Just Like a Real Family,* was published in 1983.

Kristi loves to write mysteries. Four of her books are whodunits: *Mystery by Mail, Cast a Single Shadow, The Haunting of Cabin 13,* and *Danger at Hanging Rock. The Haunting of Cabin 13* won the 1990 Maryland Children's Book Award.

Kristi finds time as well to teach at the Institute of Children's Literature .

Journal Writing

PAT RAMSEY BECKMAN

Ruth Vaughn calls the journal "the most important tool in writing creatively." It's the most effective method a writer can use. Christine Rainer says her journal is her best friend. It accepts her thoughts without criticism—"the longer you keep a journal, the more your natural voice will develop."

The more we find our natural voice, the more we learn who we are. Knowing yourself is the key to good writing and brings us to the truth. Finding the truth, that's what we are after. In the May issue of *Children's Writer*, Norma Lutz says, "As our problem falls onto the page (in our journals) it leaves us, and we can become more objective. Objectivity lets us see two sides to an issue." And this allows us to make our story characters three-dimensional, more believable.

Jim Beckman, Pat Ramsey Beckman (center), and Michele Cydulka-Weinstein.

As you write in your journal, don't be afraid of contradictions. Give yourself permission to be sloppy one day and precise the next. Follow whatever your mood dictates, because your journal writing comes from the depths of your emotions. It doesn't have to, but if you are truthful it will reveal things you may never have suspected were there—your faults, your depths, which often appear only on the written page. Sometimes when we just think, the thoughts go round and round in our heads until we write them down. Then they become clear. You find the real you, then you can translate yourself into your own writing.

Motivation for writing in a journal is interesting. It may come from loneliness, fear, or just a desire to keep track of your life. Some people have to explode onto a page, and they don't want anyone else to know their secrets. We all have secrets.

Has anyone heard of Pam Conrad? She was my mentor and manuscript advisor when I first came to Chautauqua. I knew her shortly before she died. Pam told us about the vast reservoir of research in women's journals.

One of my primary sources for research on *From the Ashes* was a journal written by a surgeon's mate at Fort Defiance, *The Journal of Joseph Gardner Andrews for the Year 1795*. This journal gave me so much insight into the hospital-fort during the last Indian wars with General Anthony Wayne.

And that brings me to a book I recommend highly for journal writers, Barry Lane's *Writing As a Road to Self-Discovery*. He says, "Words hold the keys to forgotten memories." Exactly why keeping a journal over a period of time will give you insights to know your characters. Themes will repeat themselves in your journals. By tracing the repeated themes you will discover hidden secrets about yourself. Give yourself permission to reveal these secrets to yourself. Remember seeking the truth? You may tend to be hiding things from yourself, not being truthful with your journal. But it would be wise to give yourself that permission even if you have to write it out in a permission slip. These are the vulnerable places you will want to write into your stories, the places your reader will relate to no matter how painful they are to you. Your griefs, your joys, your sadness, your anger. It's a key to understanding your story characters. You want to live inside at least one character in your story. You'll discover miracles if you do.

Have you ever discovered miracles in your journal writing revealing something you didn't know was there? A thought appears on your page. You begin to see why you have carried a grudge all these years or why you could never face conflict in your life. I have done that myself. I discovered that all those times growing up when I wanted to keep my family happy—taking the blame for troubles, carrying the guilt—came out of my position in a dysfunctional family. Here is a wonderful quote, "The child is where we start to get our truth in motion." Know your child through your journals.

You might wonder why I think it's so important to find these places of anguish. It isn't all-important. We can also look for happy things. But even in the good things, there is always an element of conflict. This was one of my problems, to reveal conflict, because I wouldn't allow myself to put that into my books. It was the hardest thing to develop (what I thought was an unhappy story) until I realized that you have to have a conflict presented and solved to make a story. Once I did realize that, I examined my own life to understand where problems lay. Life is about asking questions and digging deeper. When we write as experts our words are academic and boring, but the moment we reveal a weakness, our readers are engaged.

PAT RAMSEY BECKMAN

Pat Beckman already had a career in journalism before she even dreamed of writing a book.

Pat's discovery of two grave sites near an Ohio log cabin stirred her curiosity. She began wondering who these people were, what happened to them, and what their stories could mean to her. Countless hours of research led her on a journey back to the 1700s, and resulted in the publication of *From the Ashes* and its sequel *Colors of War*.

Pat has taught at the Intergenerational Institute in Glens Falls, New York, since 1996.

JOURNAL WRITING

We all have core stories, stories at the root of our being. Look through your journal for common themes. Listen to them on tape or read them out loud. Write one word that sums up the feeling

Joan Becker finds something funny at Monday night's dinner.

you had. Look for similarities. Free-write what you think your core story is. Write one question that lingers, and compare the questions in the journals you have kept. Find similarities. Did old memories return?

Find your big question. Free-write about the question that runs through your stories. Remember a powerful place that stands out in your mind. Were you scared, safe, lonely, confused, angry, trapped? Was there death there? These triggers are very important for your core. They're your touchstones.

In summary, you have remembered the past, searched for patterns and dreams in your journals, and begun to discover your core stories. These are all experiments. Don't worry if you haven't found your core story yet, it's a process. The journal is a tool. Each character in our stories has a problem, interior and exterior. Returning to your childhood and writing in that voice is the first step to discovering patterns of behavior. We know our characters as we know ourselves. When you have done some of these exercises, look at the story of your life. Can you feel the pain, joy, fear, sadness, wonder? Look closely. Then take your readers to whatever heights or depths your heart desires. Know these places are inside you. You have only to explore them.

Presenting Another Culture

MARIANNE MITCHELL

What is culture?

The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* defines culture this way: 1) the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc. 2) development or improvement of the mind by education or training. 3) the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group. 4) the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another.

What is culture to you? If I were to say what culture is to me, I'd have to first mention my Scandinavian heritage. All four of my grandparents emigrated from Sweden, and I learned Swedish as a child. But I also identify with the culture of the Southwest, especially the Hispanic culture. I learned to speak Spanish at an early age, and Spanish is around us everywhere in the Southwest. I also celebrate the Native American cultures. They, too, are a part of growing up in the Southwest. I enjoy learning about Native American culture, although I would not write about it because I don't know it intimately as I do Hispanic culture. In college I studied Spanish language, literature, and culture. I was a bilingual teacher for several years. I've worked with migrant children, visited their barrios, been in their homes. I was married to a Mexican-American for ten years, so the culture was definitely part of my home.

In preparing for this workshop I wrote to several children's authors I knew had written about their own culture or had written outside their culture. I asked them several questions and most of them replied. Here's a sampling of their comments:

From Eve Bunting, author of *Going Home* and *Smoky Night*: "We are all people with the same emotions and needs. Be sensitive, listen to how people talk, read multicultural books."

From Gretchen Olson, author of *Joyride*: "Write 'around' the culture rather than 'within' the culture. Have your main character be of your own culture, visiting, observing, befriending people of another culture. Remember, emotions are international bridges."

From Joseph Bruchac, author of many anthologies of Native American tales: "Be extremely careful when telling a tale from outside your own culture. . . . Take the time to truly understand it, not just write down the words. Some stories in every culture are private. I often see a lack of respect for others in the way stories are taken (without either permission or attribution) and told or published by people from outside the cultural context of the story. Be able to cite sources, be careful, be respectful, and remember to listen."

From left to right: Chris Clark, Marileta Robinson, Marianne Mitchell, Naomi Miller, and Lynn Murray pose for a group shot outside the Hall of Christ.

From Helen Hughes Vick, author of the *Walker of Time* trilogy (on Hopi culture): "There is no one absolute way to represent a culture. It is like saying all Anglo Christians open their Christmas gifts on Christmas morning. There are

MARIANNE MITCHELL

Marianne wrote her first rebus for *Highlights* in Spanish and English. The story was a hit, earning her the *Highlights* 1993 "Rebus of the Year" award. Since then, she has written dozens of stories and articles for *Highlights* and for other children's magazines, including *Jack and Jill, Turtle, Junior Trails, Our Little Friend, Skipping Stones,* and *Joyful Child Journal.*

Her bilingual picture book, *Maya Moon/Dona Luna,* a Mexican folktale, was published in 1995 by Sundance. Her most recent book, *Say It in Spanish! Language and Activities for the Elementary Classroom,* was published by Teacher Ideas Press in 1997.

vast differences and you're never going to please everyone in that culture. Research all you can, have your work reviewed by an authority on or within that culture. Most of all, base your work on the human elements, the basic human needs that everyone alive has."

Here are some of my tips for you.

Submerge yourself in the culture.

Research it. Even when you're doing a simple little story, you've got to get it right. If your story is set in a foreign country, travel there if possible. Get a feel for the seasons, the vegetation, animals . . . sensory details: smells, sounds, colors. Take loads of pictures, interview locals, collect information. If your story is set in the U.S. but centered around a particular culture, get to know the culture in that setting, too. How does it differ from the foreign setting? How does cross-cultural contact cause differences, tensions?

Sara Murray-Plumer and Rich Wallace take time for serious conversation before Monday night's dinner.

Language: do you speak it, read it, write it, understand it?

If you're dealing with a culture and a second language and you plan to incorporate some words in the story, be sure you get them right. Make sure spellings, accents, and other diacritical marks are correct. If you are an expert in the language, let the editor know that. Let them know you've had an expert look it over. If you don't know the language, then don't use it in the story.

But language isn't just foreign words. Read the stories, poetry, drama of that culture, including folktales, legends, myths. Learn oral traditions, such as songs, jokes, plays on words, double-meaning words, slang, even the bad words! Be aware of body language, good and bad gestures. Know what certain symbols mean to that culture. Are the meanings different from your culture? I once made the mistake of placing a "wise owl" on the wall in my classroom for the reading corner. Then I noticed the children never liked to go to that corner. One day a parent took me aside and said, "You know, the owl in Mexican culture is a symbol of death." Oops! The next day the owl came down. I had imposed my cultural meaning on another's.

Understand the culture's history.

How has history influenced their lives, celebrations, traditions? Who are their heroes? Who are their enemies? Who is a disgrace? What is the history of that group of people in the U.S.? What are the social and economic problems they face? In comparison to your life, how are their lives similar and dissimilar?

Make personal contacts and interact.

Make friends, share in their lifestyle, join their celebrations. Have you learned about holidays and why they're celebrated? Do you understand the basics of their religion, their taboos? Notice how the family interacts. What roles do family members play? What manners are observed that are unique to that culture? Is there someone you trust who can read and critique your writing about that culture to catch any mistakes?

Know what you don't know about the culture.

Then you can avoid mistakes like the one I made about the owl. I didn't know that I didn't know!

READ HOW OTHERS HAVE DONE IT

Jeanette Winter, *Josefina* (Mexican)

Tony Johnston, *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote* (Mexican)

Joan Abelove, *Go and Come Back* (Amazon natives)

Jerry Spinelli, *Maniac Magee* (inner city Blacks and Whites)

Katherine Paterson, *The Master Puppeteer* (Japan)

Aaron Shepard, *The Maiden of Northland* (Finland)

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Ndito Runs* (Kenya)

Roland Smith, *Thunder Cave* (Kenya)

Linda Crew, *Children of the River* (Cambodian-American)

Graham Salisbury, *Under the Blood-Red Sun* (Japanese-American)

By attending and communing at Chautauqua, we accepted the torch from previous generations to continue the work they also had been handed by the ones who went before them. We learned that there is form and meaning to our work and that although in the everyday, average world of Cheerios and small kitchens and busy schedules and demands on us, we are often viewed with skepticism or even ridicule for choosing to be the gardeners and guardians of the ground covered by other torchbearers. Our duties to the past, the present, and the future are sacred ones. We perform them by reaching out to the next generation of torchbearers at the earliest possible stage: in their childhood. In order to find the few who will carry the light, we must cover limitless ground and inform all who may be willing, at some time in the future, to take over for us.

—Cheryl Gingerich, Warwick, RI

The Naturalist's Journal

MARK K. BALDWIN

Roger Tory Peterson is known for his bird books and also for his art. But you know, Roger considered himself a teacher more than anything else. And that's one of the reasons the Peterson Institute focuses mostly on teachers and why today being invited to come here is such a thrill, because I know that Highlights and Boyds Mills Press are very interested in working with teachers and by working with teachers, influencing the lives of children.

I was told participants tend to go home, sleep two days, then write like crazy. Well, I skipped the sleeping part, tired as I was. All I've wanted to do is write!

—Bonnie L. Valentine, Waynesboro, VA

Lionel Bender and Traci Seldin aboard the Chautauqua Belle on Tuesday night.

This workshop is one that the Institute usually conducts for teachers at a nature center or a zoo or an arboretum somewhere—sometimes at the Peterson Institute itself. And what we're focusing on here is keeping a field journal or a naturalist's journal, if you will. This is an important tool in helping a person to be a more competent observer. We focus on working with teachers because teachers will take these ideas and take them back into the classroom, and they'll help their students to become more vivid writers, or more competent scientific observers by using the outdoors around their school. Now the Chautauqua Institution is a beautiful setting to do something like this. We're going to be taking advantage of that setting in just a few minutes.

Larry Rosler and Lynn Murray find time to talk at the Hotel Athenaeum.

But think now for just a minute about drawing. For most of us, sketching or drawing is something that we did in our childhood, and probably by the time we were eleven or twelve years old we stopped, unless you were the person who liked drawing so much that you wanted to make a career out of it. Now maybe there is an architect or a graphic designer or someone in this group here that would fit into that category. But how many of you would say that drawing is something that you don't do on a day-to-day basis, in the same way that you write? Now one thing that we do in the workshop is we take some time to play a little bit of Pictionary to think about drawing, not drawing in the sense of making a pretty picture but drawing in a sense of communicating information. And when we communicate an idea through a drawing, say someone is asking you how to get from

MARK K. BALDWIN

Mark K. Baldwin is the director of education at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History, Jamestown, NY.

point A to point B in the town that you live in, maybe you'll write a description for them. Some of you will draw a map. A map is a system of symbols, isn't it? And really our alphabet is a system of symbols. Numbers are symbols. In a very quick easy-to-record style, we can convey pieces of information to each other. And at a very early age (I don't know when this comes about, but very early in life I am sure), we start to develop an ability to communicate with each other in a form of symbols. By the time we're adults we drag this baggage of symbols around with us everywhere we go, even into a beautiful setting like this. And what we have a tendency to do is to look at the trees or look at the wildflowers or look at the lake, almost through a veil of symbol making. So what we need are some simple-to-learn, simple-to-teach exercises to help us to part that veil to see the world the way it really is. And it turns out that those exercises all have to do with drawing. We are borrowing ideas from the world of art training, even though I don't have any art training in my background at all. I come at this from a standpoint of a science educator. While I was teaching science to seventh graders, I started to realize (almost in spite of myself) that by teaching my kids how to draw, they were becoming better observers. And when I took them out into the field where we were doing a lab exercise, they were doing a better job because of this skill.

Now we're going to take a few minutes to practice one of these skills. It's called pure contour drawing, or pure contour sketching. Now in order to do this, first of all you need something to write with—a pencil or a pen. Now you also need something to write or draw on. For the exercises we'll be doing here, actually unlined paper is probably better than lined paper.

Eventually today we'll be taking this idea of drawing exercises and combining them with your writing skills.

Now you all need to have some little pieces of nature to look at. Walk around and find some piece of nature. Leaves that have fallen down, a cone or seed pods. Find something that catches your eye for some reason. It may be because of the design or the color. Pick it up. Let it be something about the size of your hand or smaller.

Now that you all have found a natural object, I will demonstrate a technique that will help you to be a more confident and competent observer. The technique has been around for centuries, usually taught by art instructors to their students. Their purpose was to teach their students how to see in order to, eventually, teach them how to create paintings or sculpture or some other kind of finished artwork. Our purpose is simply the process, to help us get at the truth about real objects and phenomena. The technique is "pure contour sketching," and it works like this.

Megan Harrington, supervisor of corporate communications for Highlights, managed the daily logistics of the conference.

I'm holding in my hand an object I found, turning it over, looking at it from different angles until I find one that looks particularly interesting. I'm going to make a sketch of this object, but only after I've played a little mental trick on myself: I'm going to imagine that the place I'm looking at is actually being touched by my pencil point. It always takes several seconds for that mental "shift" to happen, but once it does, I will start to let my eyes wander over the surface of the object while my pencil point wanders in the same way over the surface of the page. As my eyes wander, I'm finding it convenient to imagine that I'm following a small bug that is exploring the object. As it creeps into all the nooks and crannies that define the object's shape, I follow along, drawing a continuous line on the page that records its movements. When I am finished, I have a strange-looking drawing because I did not look at the page the entire time I drew. Now I will give you all a chance to try this.

What you have done by sketching an object while all of your attention is focused on the object itself and none of your attention is on your paper, is to awaken a process of active seeing. By learning to see clearly and truthfully, writers, as well as artists and scientists, can avoid banality.

I have gained a sense that someone else does see some possibilities in my writing. It was exciting talking about living, breathing writing for children with other people who felt the same way. My sense of isolation, Don Quixote "tilting at windmills," and the futility of the writing-rejection cycle have been whittled down to manageable and even humorous-outlook proportions.

—Kathy Warnes, Oconomowoc, WI

This drawing technique, when combined with several others that we teach during our day-long workshop, is designed to enhance the powers of observation, to help get us to see and record what is actually going on in the natural world. We capture our observations in field journals, blank books that hold all sorts of observations, questions, and conclusions. These records are made in the form of both written notes and sketched images, along with objects pasted or taped in, to create a working document of personal discovery, a place to practice active sensory perception. This work in progress, in turn, can become a rich resource to draw on for writing, art, or science—for all of these rely on the expression of truth and accuracy.

Writing for Teacher Publications

PAT BRODERICK

I'm going to give you steps you really must go through to increase your chances of having an editor say "yes" to your manuscript. It doesn't matter whether you want to write for a consumer magazine or for a professional magazine or journal, the following steps are musts.

First words of advice: First and foremost, write what you know. You've heard that all your life, but it really is the primordial truth. Now, how you know your subject, whether it's experience or whether it's good research, doesn't matter, as long as you know it well. For instance, don't attend a three-hour workshop on inclusion, then come home and parrot the presenter's words. Wait until you make that information your own, until it's a part of your professional arsenal, then write about it with an authentic voice.

Research. The second piece of advice I have for you is do your research. ALL writing is sixty percent research, ten percent writing, and thirty percent editing. Whether fiction or nonfiction, the working writer begins a creative process with research.

There are basically two kinds of research: the first kind is to determine in what publication you think your writing would fit best. As an example, all magazines in education are not created equal. We all have different missions, and we all define our market differently. To determine the magazine of your choice you need to read at least six back issues of all potential candidates. You can then narrow down possible platforms.

The other type of research that you must do is content research. Even if you're very familiar with your topic, check current research. Every day we learn more about the way kids learn and it's critical to be sure that whatever you're writing fits with the newest findings.

Be sure to save all of your research. A good rule of thumb is to do your research once and use it several times. Research folders are an easy way to keep information handy.

Records. Keep a magazine analysis sheet. When you've done your research on the magazines for which you want to write, be sure you've completed an analysis sheet on each one, then keep it in a file. When you want to write another piece, you'll have some of the legwork done as far as market, article length, and so on.

Article checklists are also important, so you can keep track of the articles you have out and their status: whether they've been returned, accepted, or whatever.

Writing. We'll now talk a bit about the ten percent of any manuscript that is writing. Writing can't be taught, but it can be learned. And the best way to learn it is to write, write, write. Writing is a discipline and really has to be incorporated into your day, every day, if you're serious about it. If you don't keep a journal, you should start. That's really the first step to becoming a writer.

The actual writing for a magazine is not different from any other writing. However, the structure of a piece is different for magazines. The goal of magazine writing is to get the information off the page for the reader. A good way to do this is to show, not tell. That's really key. Also, think charts, checklists and sidebars. They save space, organize information, and make for a more appealing page.

If you're having trouble getting started, try a cluster. This organizes your writing before you begin. There is one possible pitfall, though. Make sure the central point in your cluster is the topic of your writing, or you'll have trouble pulling it together.

I'd also keep a source book, a notebook that's always with you and into which you jot words or phrases you hear that please you in some way. Then, when you're writing, rather than use Roget, use the words from your source

Pat Broderick (left) with Jean Wood. Pat displays with pride the sweater, hand-knit by Joy Cowley, which Pat purchased at Thursday night's auction.

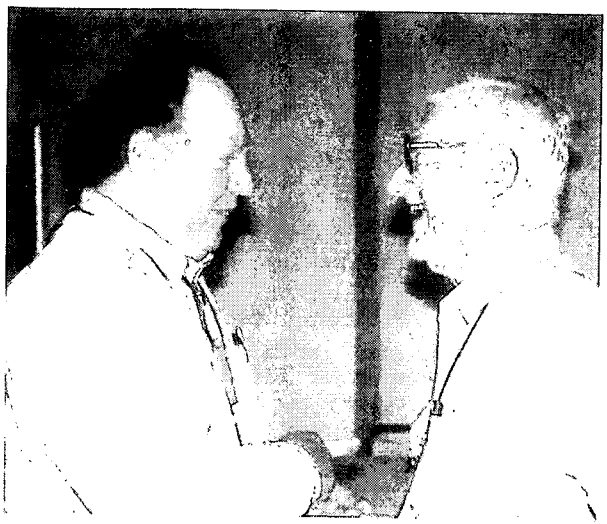
PAT BRODERICK

Pat Broderick is the vice president, editorial director, and cofounder of *Teaching Pre K-8 (formerly Early Years)*, a respected periodical for educators. For the past thirty-nine years, she has dedicated herself to excellence in the field of educational publishing.

Pat landed her first job in publishing with Teacher's Publishing Corporation, as director of the supplementary materials division. She moved on to cofound *Early Years*, which won a Golden Lamp Award for excellence from the Educational Press Association of America.

book. They'll be in your rhythm, and you'll be more comfortable with them.

When preparing actual manuscript copy, opt for the active voice, particularly in a professional publication. It's more critical there than in other types of writing. Remember also, when writing for teachers, that the *who* and the *when* in your manuscript are less important than the *what* and the *why*. As an editor, I prefer manuscripts in the first person because you're trying to tell me about YOUR classroom, YOUR technique. Be specific, not wordy.



Kent Brown (left) and Dick Bell, Highlights Chairman.

One final thought on writing: An amateur writes about what he or she feels. A professional writes about what he or she sees.

Editing. The last thirty percent of the equation. There are six elements of editing: 1) edit for your market (who's going to read your article), 2) edit for accuracy (did you fact-check?), 3) edit for content (did you stick to your topic?), 4) style (were you consistent in spelling, tense, and so on?), 5) edit for space (how many words are acceptable to the publication receiving your manuscript?), 6) edit for flow (Did you cut? Do you need bridges?). Each of these editing steps must be done separately.

Testing. Read your completed manuscript into a tape recorder. Your voice will tell you if you've left out something or if there's a problem. Trust your voice.

Another test is placing your typed manuscript in the pages of the magazine or journal to which you want to submit it. Read the feature before, read your manuscript, and read the following feature. You'll know if it fits the format and the audience.

A third test is to outline the manuscript *after* you've completed it. The outline will give away the places you haven't balanced your approach or if you've left out something.

Sending it in. Don't send off your manuscript as soon as you've finished. Put it away for at least three weeks. Then subject it to the tests again. I guarantee that you'll make changes.

Please do send a cover letter with a manuscript, so I—or any other editor—know how to position what I'm reading. And I'd appreciate it if you didn't do a multiple submission. I invest a good bit of thinking and planning from the get-go. If I do a lot of planning and get a letter when we're working on the manuscript telling me the author has changed his or her mind and has accepted the offer of another publisher for the same manuscript, I lose a lot of valuable time, as does our art director, and so on.

Final advice. Be patient with yourself. Growth in writing takes guidance, reassurance, patience, and time.

My favorite part, however, was the personal interaction with the faculty at meal times and between sessions. That was invaluable! I was most impressed with the fact that the faculty members were down-to-earth, "here-to-help-you" people. Their genuine interest in providing practical answers to my questions, as well as their general approachableness, made the conference first-rate.

Chautauqua not only gave me writing tips, marketing advice, and writing fundamentals, it gave me the rocket I needed to reach the stars. After hearing such tremendous speakers and examples of tremendous children's literature, I had the fuel I needed to lift off.

—Lisa D. Cowman, Norwalk, OH

Susan Tejada (left) and Patricia McKissack on the porch of the Hotel Athenaeum.

Together for a Week

Attending the Foundation Workshop in 1998

Susan Ackerman, Newport News, VA; Lisa Albert, Muskego, WI; Amy Anastasia, Olean, NY; Kathy Anderson, Elburn, IL; Barbara Baka, Cleveland, OH; Myriam Barthole, Lincroft, NJ; Joan Becker, Fresno, CA; Susan Beckhorn, Rexville, NY; Barbara Bender, San Diego, CA; Ann Berger, New York, NY; William Boggs, Lutherville, MD; Erin Brown, Lakewood, OH; Virginia Butler, Leesville, LA; Susan Byrnes, Columbus, OH; Lee Carpenter, Wellesley, MA; Norla Chee, Farmington, NM; Lisa Cowman, Norwalk, OH; Robin Cox, Valrico, FL; Pamela Crowe, Batavia, NY.

Michele Cydulka-Weinstein, Shaker Heights, OH; Lillian Davis, Keene, TX; Nancy Dearborn, Tucson, AZ; Phyllis Deer, Lakeville, MN; Andrea Early, Charlestown, MA; Sharon Edwards, Santa Ana, CA; Amy Elder, Osprey, FL; John Farrell, Brewster, NY; Lynda Feldman, Watertown, NY; Martha Fenoglio, West Chester, PA; Jane Ferguson, Bowen Island, BC, Canada; Brenda Fillingim, Vincennes, IN; Jessica Fonicello, Guilford, CT; Joan Gallup, Philadelphia, PA; Cheryl Gingerich, rwick, RI.

It is a high energy workshop with experts guiding you, experts who represent every facet of publishing for children. You can sit with each and every one of them one-on-one. They are patient with every question because they want to see you succeed and are dedicated to the next excellent book, article, report. You can't get into trouble; you can't be left out. The dedicated, warm staff of Highlights for Children *won't allow you any misfortunes or leave any need unattended.*

—Jerry Wermund, Buda, TX

Richard Golden, Naples, FL; Helen Gotkowitz, El Cajon, CA; Mary Griffin, Farmville, VA; Liz Hall, Huntsville, AL; Barbara Harding, Herndon, VA; Kelly Hoalcraft, Washington, WV; Kathleen Hogan, Springfield, OR; Toni Jeffries, Midland, MI; Martha Kearney, Dalton, PA; Jane Kinsdale, Denver, CO; Beverly Klatt, Bryan, TX; Deborah Lamson, Saylorsburg, PA; Tess Langfus, Maple Grove, MN; Ruth Major, Pocono Pines, PA; Katherine Manley, Chapmanville, WV; Mary Martin, Liberty, TX; Cheri Maude, Alpine, UT; Gwynneth Megahan, Avignon, France.

Mary Beth Miller, Coudersport, PA; Naomi Miller, Tucson, AZ; Leslie Morales, Silver Springs, MD; Peter Morgridge, Briarcliff, NY; Lynn Murray, Tucson, AZ; Sara Murray-Plumer, Indianapolis, IN; Julie Nicholas, Cincinnati, OH; Carol O'Connor, Palm City, FL; Ruth Pedrocco, W. Palm Beach, FL; Mariam Pineno, Selinsgrove, PA; Patrice Pittman, Louisville, KY; Helen Placanica, Sherwood, Queensland, Australia; Jan Riley, Fresno, CA; Ruth Rimmer, Mesa, AZ.

Amelia Root, Weslaco, TX; Susan Rose, Tafers, Switzerland; Joan Rudloff, Pottsville, PA; Janet Schultz, St. Peter, MN; Traci Seldin, Scottsdale, AZ; Carole Silva, Encino, CA; Ted Simonin, Niagara Falls, NY; Sally Ann Sims, West Chester, PA; Carlene Smart, Lee, ME; Sue Ellen Spaulding, Anderson, IN; Dee Storey, Saginaw, MI; Patricia Tessler, St. Louis, MO; Ann Treacy, Duluth, MN; Bonnie Valentine, Waynesboro, VA; Jan Vincent, Alpine, UT; Pat Vojta, Winnetka, IL.

Nancy Wallach, Brooklyn, NY; Kathleen Warnes, Oconomowoc, WI; Jerry Wermund, Buda, TX; Pat Wheeler, Terre Haute, IN; Roger Williamson, Houston, TX; Virginia Wiseman, Wadsworth, OH; Mary Witkowski, Moorestown, NJ; Vicki Wittenstein, Brooklyn, NY.

1998 Guest Faculty

Patricia Ramsey Beckman, Bluffton, SC; Lionel Bender, London, England; Patricia Broderick, Norwalk, CT; Mary Lou Carney, Chesterton, IN; Joy Cowley, Picton, New Zealand; Brent Farmer Watertown, MA; Patricia Lee Gauch, Hyde Park, NY; James Cross Giblin, New York, NY; Andrew Gutelle, Montclair, NJ; Rosanna Hansen, Tuckahoe, NY; Linda Oatman High, Narvon, PA.

Kristi Holl, Story City, IA; Dayton O. Hyde, Hot Springs, SD; Peter Jacobi, Bloomington, IN; Fredrick McKissack, Chesterfield, MO; Patricia McKissack, Chesterfield, MO; Marianne Mitchell, Tucson, AZ; Judith O'Malley, Chicago, IL; Laurence Pringle, West Nyack, NY; Maria Salvadore, Washington, DC; Jewell Stoddard, Washington, DC; Susan Tejada, Bethesda, MD; Neil Waldman, White Plains, NY; Carolyn Yoder, Henniker, NH; Jane Yolen, Hatfield, MA.

1998 Foundation Faculty and Staff

Carrie Abel; Richard H. Bell, chairman of the board, Highlights for Children, Inc.; Andy Boyles, science editor, *Highlights for Children*; Kent L. Brown Jr., publisher, Boyds Mills Press, and editor, *Highlights for Children*; Garry Myers Brown, director of the Teachers Publishing Group; Sandy, David, Josh, and Justin Brown.

Judy Burke, assistant editor, *Highlights for Children*; Jan Cheripko, assistant to the publisher, Boyds Mills Press; Christine French Clark, vice president, Highlights for Children, Inc., and managing editor, *Highlights for Children*.

Tonya Coles; Tim Gillner, art director, Boyds Mills Press; Connie Gross, administrative coordinator of finance, *Highlights for Children*; Kate Harding, editorial intern, *Highlights for Children*; Megan Harrington, supervisor, corporate communications, *Highlights for Children*; Donna LaBar, administrative supervisor, *Highlights for Children*; Kristin Meagher; Jack Myers, senior science editor, *Highlights for Children*.

Marileta Robinson, senior editor, *Highlights for Children*; Larry Rosler, editorial director, Boyds Mills Press; Charlie Rossbach, senior maintenance technician, *Highlights for Children*; Rich Wallace, coordinating editor, *Highlights for Children*; Clay Winters, president, Boyds Mills Press; Jean Wood, associate editor, *Highlights for Children*; Kate Yerkes, editorial intern, Boyds Mills Press.

The Highlights Writers Conference at Chautauqua is the best-organized conference I have ever attended. The choice of distinguished and dedicated faculty, and the atmosphere of sincere and genuine eagerness to encourage and inspire have been for me a unique intellectual and spiritual experience. With such inspiration, I am confident that I can become a writer who will affect many young lives, the lives of children, who are the leaders of tomorrow.

—Myriam Barthole, Lincroft, NJ

The participants in the 1998 Highlights Foundation Writers Workshop at Chautauqua gathered Thursday morning for this picture. The complete roster can be found on page 40.

In 1999, put yourself in this picture

For information on the 1999 Workshop, mail the coupon from the centerfold. Or phone 570-253-1192 (E-mail: HFWriters@aol.com) and ask for a Workshop information kit.

The distinguished writers, artists, editors, and educators listed below will be among our faculty in 1999:

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Gary L. Blackwood
Andy Boyles
Pat Broderick
Kent Brown
Judy Burke
Mary Lou Carney
Christine French Clark
Joy Cowley
Bernice E. Cullinan
Andrea Early
Judith Enderle
Margery Facklam
Brent Farmer
Carole Fiore
Patricia Lee Gauch
James Cross Giblin
Stephanie Gordon
Monica Gunning
Andrew Gutelle
Dayton O. Hyde
Peter Jacobi
Martin Kaminsky
Jack Myers
Laurence Pringle
Kim Richardson
Marileta Robinson
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David Small
Sarah Stewart
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